

Editor's Note: *Welcome* to the December edition of the bulletin. I cannot quite believe how the last month has just flown by!

Since the last bulletin, we've had ministerial visits, the launch of the Property Protection Advisor and, as I write, we've just had the major storm that happened across the country, particularly along the East Coast. If you need any *support* as a result of the flooding, please call our helpline: 01299 403055.

Once again, any feedback on the bulletin will be much appreciated so that we can continue to

improve it. If you would like to contribute an article, photo, painting or your thoughts, please contact me: hannah.tankard@floodforum.org.uk.

Finally, the National Flood Forum team wish all our readers and flood action groups a very...

***Merry Christmas
& a Happy New Year!***

With festive good wishes,

Hannah (The Editor)

Introducing Alec & the Southampton Pathfinder Project



By Alec Summersgill
(Community Flood Resilience
Officer, Southampton)

The Southampton Pathfinder Project has kicked off and is building up pace, *rapidly*: in fact, through requests from the local residents the project name has been informally changed and is now titled the '*Belsize Flood Resilience Project*'. Belsize was the name of a boatyard that once occupied the land where a new residential development now stands. Research from the residents suggests that the word 'Belsize' is derived from 'bel assis', French for 'well situated' – a fitting name for the project considering that *St Denys* is an area with fantastic access to the river and city centre.

In my role as a community flood resilience project officer I have been keeping in touch with residents on a regular basis. Southampton City Council and I have been helping to improve the understanding and awareness of flood risk, and supporting residents with any queries they have about the project... *often over*

a nice cup of tea! This month we have helped residents to set up of their own informal gatherings to talk about the project in more detail and to discuss flood preparedness actions in the community.

Several residents from the community are in the process of setting up a *local flood warning network*. This network will help to ensure that everyone in the community is aware of when a flood may occur. These residents are keen to share their knowledge about the local flood risk and would like to support their community, whether it is by door-knocking to alert people to flooding or to help others protect their homes with sandbags or any other property level protection measures.

The project to date has been extremely rewarding, just seeing residents more connected with their neighbours has been a joy. They are all so welcoming and have already given considerable amounts of time and effort to the successful progression of the project. I look forward to continuing to work alongside them over the months to come. *Thank you!*

Supporting and representing flood risk communities

Publication of New Flood Risk Information

By the Environment Agency

In December the Environment Agency publishes new and updated maps on its website. These maps show the risk of flooding from rivers and the sea, reservoirs, and surface water. Summary PDF maps will also be available showing what is at risk of flooding in each River Basin District. These maps ensure we meet our requirements under the Flood Risk Regulations, and more importantly, provide the best available flood risk information to the public.

A new map showing the risk of flooding from rivers and the sea takes into account existing flood defences, showing a more realistic picture of risk. The surface water map shows the risk of surface water flooding resulting from rainfall. Four new categories are now being used to describe risk – high, medium, low and very low.

The information shown on the flood maps will enable communities and individuals to better understand their flood risk and take appropriate action to reduce their risk, such as preparing a flood plan or undertaking property level protection measures. The Environment Agency has made this flood risk information available to the insurance industry.

Check your flood risk online at www.environment-agency.gov.uk/flood.

Riparian Ownership: What's it all about?

We have had a request for more information about riparian ownership and responsibilities. Exactly who is responsible for what can be extremely complex.

The Environment Agency have recently rewritten their booklet "Living on the Edge", the most recent guidance available. This can be found at: <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/news/150804.aspx>

The Storm

Current estimates are that 1400 properties were flooded in the recent storms along the East Coast and in North Wales. This is a traumatic time for people whose homes have been inundated, particularly on the run up to Christmas. We know how incredibly difficult this can be.

The National Flood Forum is currently working in North Lincolnshire and North Yorkshire, supporting people with the slow process of recovery. If you have been affected and would like help, please contact Amanda Davies on 01299 403101 or at amanda.davies@floodforum.org.uk.

Environment Agency figures show that due to last week's storm 800,000 properties were protected by flood defences. This reflects the huge amount of work that has taken place since 1953, but the figures for those who did flood show that there is still a great deal to do.

The Property Protection Advisor

By Paul Cobbing (Chief Executive)

We are gradually pulling together materials that we hope will help people to *protect* their homes.

Dan Rogerson, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Water, Forestry, Rural Affairs and Resource Management, formally launched the Property Protection Adviser during a visit to South Zeal in West Devon on the 18th November. Defra developed the *online calculator*, with JBA, to help people understand the cost of reducing their flood risk using property-level protection methods. The calculator provides estimates based upon information entered about the property and its location; it is a *first step* in thinking about what might be possible. However, it is important to emphasise that before undertaking any work you should seek *professional advice*.

The Advisor is located on the '*Protecting your Property*' page of the [National Flood Forum website](#) together with guidance on how to protect your property and the Environment Agency Flood Risk Report. We hope to bring together more tools and guidance in the future, as it becomes available.

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Uniting West Sussex's Flood Action Groups

By Ruth Webb (Community Flood Resilience Project Officer, West Sussex)

For the first time in West Sussex flood action groups from all over the county came together under one roof to discuss their flooding issues, share their achievements, and meet others who have been through what they've been through. So many of the groups share common issues, and we at the National Flood Forum hoped that this event would be a fantastic opportunity to begin forming links and relationships between the flood action groups, so that *additional help and support* is available whenever it is needed.

In addition to the flood action groups, there were representatives from the County and District councils, the Environment Agency and Defra; however, the National Flood Forum worked very hard to ensure that the event remained focused around the *communities*, which worked quite well! Conversations were flowing, the spirit was high, and most importantly, the *groups were the centre of attention!*

The *feedback was positive* from both the groups and the agencies that attended. Robert Carey, from the Birdham and Earnley Flood Prevention

Group, said: "I found the event very useful because it enabled me to meet members of other flood action groups and pick up some *useful information and contacts*. It was encouraging to realise that many of those who have influence, including members and employees of the County Council and the Environment Agency, were supporting flood action groups and their initiatives."



Members of the Littlehampton Flood Action Group

In fact, the event was so successful that the flood action groups have *unanimously requested for there to be another one* in the Spring (but next time with wine...); of course, the National Flood Forum is more than happy to help organise this!

A Water Bill Update

By Paul Cobbing (Chief Executive)

We strive to ensure flood risk communities are promoted at the national level. So, when I gave oral evidence on *flood risk insurance* to the Water Bill Public Bill Committee on 3rd December, I tried to do just that. The Bill provides the legislative framework that will allow either the Government's preferred model, Flood Re, or its fall back plan, the Flood Insurance Obligation, to work. The National Flood Forum has been working hard over many months to ensure that the result is insurance that is:

- *Accessible;*
- *Affordable; and*
- *Protects the most vulnerable.*

We have also been pushing to make sure that the information collected for these new systems is shared and *used to help reduce flood risk*, particularly for the most vulnerable and the highest risk communities, rather than being simply a financial mechanism.

The Water Bill still has a long way to go, but is planned to pass in to law next May, with the new scheme starting in the summer of 2015. In the meantime there is a huge amount of work to do ensure that the scheme delivers *the best long term solution* possible, and we will continue to be actively engaged in the process.

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A View from West Beach

By Geoff Patmore (Vice Chair, West Beach Residents Association)

West Beach, West Sussex is situated on the outskirts of Lancing, on the edge of a massive flood plain between Lancing and Shoreham. The settlement is coastal, a 5 minute walk from the sea. West Beach suffers from frequent severe flooding on the roads, although no houses have been flooded.



Aerial View of Lancing

Flooding is caused by run-off from the South Downs and from both surface water and groundwater from the flood plain; there is also a tidal influence. The major problem is that all the roads are owned by a developer. There seems to be serious issues regarding the maintenance of the watercourses on the flood plain and no maintenance of the soak-away system on the developer-owned roads.

As West Beach Residents Association we were trying, to no avail, to seek help to ease our flooding problems. We adopted a scattergun approach; this resulted in being passed from agency to agency. Over many years we discovered the key agency people to contact but it seemed that nobody was listening, or if they were it was like wading through treacle. We felt isolated and alone.

Then, we decided to contact the National Flood Forum (NFF). Heather Shepherd was like a breath of fresh air: it was as if Wonder Woman had walked into the room! The methodology promoted by the NFF opens doors to partnership working with the statutory agencies and it really works.

The NFF enabled an unprecedented meeting between ourselves and all the key agencies. From this a sub-group has been set up with West Beach

residents: the outcome has been an agreement to undertake a scoping exercise to assess the drainage issues in and around the West Beach catchment area. This is a major breakthrough, but it is early days. However, with the support of the NFF we are moving forward at last.

West Beach Flood Forum members attended the Community Flood Action event organised by West Sussex County Council and the NFF at Littlehampton Town Hall on the 7th November. Here we were introduced to senior councillors, Louise Goldsmith (Leader of West Sussex County Council), and officers from the Environment Agency and Defra. Jane Smeaton from West Felpham Flood Action Assembly (WFFAA) gave a wonderful presentation: she outlined the development of WFFAA and its successes in combatting the flooding issues in that area.

At the event we met other flood action groups in West Sussex; we were blown away by the similarity of flooding events and issues affecting all areas of the South Coast: for example, irresponsible flood plain development, riparian law, psychological effects of the constant threat of flooding and remedial actions.

We met some other NFF staff who are very committed: Ruth was run off her feet organising and ensuring we were comfortable; and Amanda was staffing the flood prevention products display. I enjoyed the moment I picked up a piece of flood protection kit and asked "what is this?" Amanda answered: "it's a device you insert in a toilet to stop sewage overflowing into the bathroom." Needless to say I dropped it instantly! (It had never been used.)

We can only describe the event as cathartic. We realised that we are not alone: the information we gathered and networking with other groups and agencies will be invaluable in our efforts to reduce our specific flooding problems.

Many thanks to the NFF, West Sussex and Environment Agency: it was brilliant. We look forward to our continued partnership with you in the future.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in the bulletin are those of the writers and are not necessarily those of the National Flood Forum.

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