



Newsletter

Autumn 2007

SUMMER FLOODS SPECIAL

The NFF in Yorkshire

by Heather Shepherd and Paul Hendy



Escaping the Floods in Catcliffe

It is amazing how quickly we get to know you all when we are working in your community.

To be with you and help in any way possible has meant that we have been privileged to hear all your often heartbreaking stories, but also to join in on the moments of laughter too.

Knowing that we have managed to offer general advice on flooding issues, sort out many insurance problems, assist with

grant applications and work alongside multi-agencies in advice centres has greatly compensated for living out of a suitcase and being away from our own families.

We have also implemented the formation of Flood Action Groups in flooded areas of Sheffield, Rotherham, Doncaster, Wakefield and Hull.

The team has seen first hand all the wonderful people who have dedicated their time to offer help, and they deserve a mention:

- The Salvation Army and WRVS - what amazing people providing sustenance, a listening ear and plenty more.
- The councils who did a fantastic job, and still continue to do so, to support their communities.
- The Environment Agency for making authorities and organisations aware of

Continued on Page 3...

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In This Issue...

The Minister's Say.....	2
Crawford: how they can help..	4
Summer Floods Reports.....	5

Tewkesbury
Catcliffe - Sheffield
Burstwick - Hull
North Cave - Hull
Ripon
Wakefield
Worcester
Upton
Longlevens - Gloucester
Osney Island



Mary Dhonau

Well, what a "summer" it has been - one in which there has been a greater need than ever for the work of the National Flood Forum. From the moment the floods kicked off in South Yorkshire until they ended on the Thames, our phone lines didn't stop ringing for a second - with only two of us manning them!

As I write this in early September, requests for advice keep pouring in with so many people anxious to help themselves prevent a repeat of what has happened. Neither Amanda Davies, NFF office manager, nor I are trained counsellors so we have both been pretty traumatised by many of the phone calls we took. I have to pay tribute to Amanda, our wonderful office manager and PA who has worked so hard to offer the support needed by so many people.

I have been proud to represent the voice of the flood victim on television, radio and in the newspapers. Luckily I have the 'gift of the gab' and am able to easily portray just how awful it is to be flooded as well as offer advice to those newly flooded and was glad to be given the chance to do so.

Right now I think the biggest worry on everyone's mind is just how the insurance industry is going to react to the £3 billion price tag the floods of this summer have given them. In Worcester, where I live, one woman experienced flooding for the first time and already has a £10k excess. *

To those who work in the insurance industry who are reading this, I urge you to show compassion and work quickly to help people back into their homes and please, please treat them with the respect they deserve after such

Continued on Page 3...

* **STOP PRESS...** The NFF were involved in lobbying for a reduction in this excess and I am please to say that it has recently been cut to £1000

Message from the Minister



Phil Woolas MP

The wettest May to July on record back to 1766 has caused severe flooding, tragically marked by loss of life and considerable disruption, including to water supplies for two weeks in Gloucestershire and Worcestershire. Only prompt and highly committed action by the emergency services, the Environment Agency,

local authorities, water companies, the voluntary sector and other organisations prevented the consequences from being very much worse. The Association of British Insurers anticipates 60,000 claims totalling £3 billion and repairs are likely to take many months.

Readers of this article may themselves have suffered or know family or friends who have. I have seen the devastation myself at first hand and I extend my sympathies to them. I would also like to extend my very grateful thanks to the National Flood Forum for the work that they have done during and after the floods in helping those affected and advising them on how to get back on their feet as quickly as possible.

The Government's immediate response was two-fold. Firstly the Prime Minister has appointed John Healey at Communities and Local Government to be Floods Recovery Minister, responsible for co-ordinating the Government contribution to helping communities recover. A recovery package of over £46 million has been put together for local authorities to help flood-hit members of their communities get back on their feet, for repair of roads, for schools and children's services and to help local businesses. This is in addition to the usual funding that is available to reimburse local authorities for their own exceptional costs, for example to safeguard life and property.

Secondly we have asked Sir Michael Pitt to undertake an independent, wide-ranging and thorough review to identify any lessons to be learned for the way that we

manage and respond to flooding events such as these and which will include consideration of wider flood risk management issues. Sir Michael is aiming to publish initial findings by the end of the year and subsequently a formal report. The review will hear from those involved at the local, regional and national level with a structured approach to public engagement so that the voices of local communities are heard including affected individuals and locally elected representatives (councillors and local MPs). The review team can be contacted by email at 2007floodreview@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk or at Flood Review, Cabinet Office, 10 Great George Street, London, SW1P 3AE (<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/floodingreview/>)

In the longer term we will continue with our commitment to manage flood risk effectively including taking account of climate change. We are developing a broad and integrated range of measures in our developing new strategy, Making Space for Water, including emergency planning, improving urban drainage and resilience of vital infrastructure. We are pleased to be working with the National Flood Forum, the insurance industry and other key stakeholders to identify ways to promote the uptake of property-level flood resilience, including flood-resilient repair for properties damaged by these floods. Our investment programme is maintaining and improving community defences around the country.

We will increase spend across the national programme as a whole from the current £600 million per year to £800 million by 2010-11 – a rate of increase in line with that suggested by our 2004 Foresight Future Flooding study which examined flood risk to the end of the century. The Environment Agency is developing an investment strategy to set out future flood management activities over a 20 year forward planning period.

We have to acknowledge we cannot prevent all flooding but we will continue to work hard to reduce the risks and the impacts when it does occur.

Phil Woolas

Minister for the Environment

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

The NFF in Yorkshire

Continued From Front Page ...

NFF's presence, their help and support.

- The churches and their members for putting their hands to all kinds of things to support their neighbours.
- The existing community groups for the hours they put in to listen to concerns.
- The members of the general public who have involved themselves in different ways to lend support.
- Local businesses that have made donations.
- And of course the flooded folk themselves for their camaraderie, resilience and protectiveness towards each other.

Here are some of you and what you have had to endure:

Mr and Mrs Farmer and their daughter Aileen had 12 feet of water in their house bringing down the ceilings!

At 83 years old, and having had several heart attacks already, Walt is finding it all too much to bear, he and his wife keep remembering all the memories they have lost and Walt is always choked with tears. This is just what you don't want at 83, the stress for them is incomprehensible.

I have driven Walt from his temporary home to his flooded address and he has been able to point out all the buildings that bring back memories to him from school days to work and his active days in the community as a well known and respected member of the village. The house has to be seen to be believed. Their loss is so great that their insurance cover is not enough to cover the extensive damage. We have been in constant touch with their insurance company and make

Continued From Front Page ...

an awful time. The NFF agrees with the Association of British Insurers in welcoming the increase in the flood defence budget but would ask for much more, and **now**.

I also urge all victims of the recent floods to seriously consider resilient repair (details on the front pages of the NFF web site). I personally have just experienced the benefits and so has the resident of the FLOWS flood resilient house in Lowestoft featured in two past editions of our newsletter. The occupier was flooded last November, moved in with her mother overnight, mopped down the next day and moved back home. I firmly believe with the increased threat of flooding, resilient repair could well reduce the huge disruption to our lives we may all face in the future.

The thoughts and best wishes are with everyone flooded this summer from all at the National Flood Forum. Hang in there; it does get better - eventually.

Mary Dhonau, National coordinator NFF

regular visits to his temporary address. They are actively looking to buy another home.

The residents in three properties owned by a housing association which has decided to move them out one at a time to recover their homes.

Their insurance company are using an 'accelerated drying process' which will enable the builders to restore their home in a **minimum** of six weeks per house. In the mean time the other two families have to remain in their flooded properties and wait their turn.

Poor Sheila and Malcolm are at the end of the queue and are going to have to put up with flooded conditions for a minimum of 18 weeks before they are moved - and that is not including the approaching seven weeks before the initial work begins.

Melissa and Wayne have to remain in their flooded property for a minimum of 12 weeks plus the initial seven weeks. It is a disgrace that they were not made priority. They have a nine month baby and the stress of Melissa's situation has caused her emotional instability. All of them still have to pay full rent.

Shame on those sitting in a dry office in remote Lincolnshire.

There are many thousands of you we know with as many stories of what you have had to endure. We would just like you to know that at the NFF we understand everything you have to go through at the moment and are here with a listening ear and can help in a number of ways so please do contact us.

The information that we gather from you helps us gain a clear picture of the common pitfalls which enables us to become an authoritative voice on your behalf.

The NFF has been working in Yorkshire for a few months but unfortunately, although there is a desperate need for us to continue with the support work we initiated, the cut in funding to the NFF has meant that constraints have been put on our work there. If anyone can fund us in any way to provide longevity to the essential work of the NFF please get in touch so we can get on with the job of supporting the flooded communities.

Best wishes to all we have spoken to while working in Yorkshire and Humberside and all we have not. You are in our thoughts.

Heather and Paul



Paul Hendy



Heather Shepherd

The UK Floods : How Crawford & Company Can Help

At Crawford & Company we understand just how disruptive and upsetting the aftermath of flooding can be. Rest assured, we will work with policyholders of our insurer clients so that they can return to normality as soon as possible.

The role of the loss adjuster

As loss adjusters we are independent and impartial claims specialists who are employed by insurance companies.

When a Crawford loss adjuster visits you to discuss the circumstances of your claim, he/she will primarily focus on checking the following:

1. That the loss or damage falls within the terms of your insurance policy
2. That the amounts being claimed for are fair and reasonable.

The adjuster will help you understand the claims and repair processes. Once the findings are reported and recommendations made to the insurance company, your claim can be progressed. Where appropriate, we are also able to arrange interim funding of approved costs to cover expenses incurred to date.

Our response and expertise

For many years, Crawford - the world's largest claims and risk management company - has been dealing with flood claims. We are independent claims specialists appointed to ensure a fair settlement under the terms of your policy. It is important though to note that the sheer scale of this particular incident - the biggest for over 20 years affecting over a million people and with claims estimated to total £3bn - brings challenges to our business which we are working hard to meet.

You can also help speed things up by ensuring that we have full contact details for you, including alternative telephone numbers, in order to arrange these visits.

Please ask us if you are not sure of anything and we will do our best to help or seek further advice for you.

The process

One of our initial key priorities was to ensure that your property was safe. This required a preliminary assessment; removal of wet contents such as carpets, non-breathable wall coverings, fixtures and fittings; cleaning out and commencing the drying out process. Afterwards, the processes are to closely monitor moisture levels (this varies according to structural type); prepare and agree a specification of works; carry out approved repairs; and, finally, hand back the property to you.

Please note that the following can happen during the processes described above: mould can grow although this is not harmful and is a part of the normal drying process; timbers will change dimension as the moisture levels alter; shrinkage cracks can develop, just as in a new house and plaster can become loose. All items will be assessed with you and dealt with as part of the usual repair process.

At the time of construction, all properties contain large amounts of water in concrete cement and plaster mixes. With a few exceptions, traditional types of buildings are quite resilient to immersion in flooding.

In our experience, the drying out of a building can take some time and we would ask for your patience whilst this essential part of the process is carried out. The position will be closely monitored and we will carefully review with you what needs to be done to put things right.

How you can help

To speed up the drying out process and restoration process it is imperative that building contents and non-restorable items such as carpets are removed from the property as quickly as possible. In most cases, this has already been done. It is important though now to ensure that dehumidifiers are turned on and operated as per the guidelines supplied to ensure efficient drying out.

Crawford's repairNet service is a large contractor network we manage which arranges for specialist contractors to conduct repair and

restoration work in your property.

On larger and more complex claims, we provide Crawford Surveying Services, a fully integrated surveying and repair service. With access to a network of over 130 specialist contractors across the UK, and over 60 of our in-house building professionals, Crawford Surveying Services enables large repairs to be completed quickly and efficiently.

Our professionals specialise in:

- Emergency response
- Fire, flood and other building repairs
- Disaster restoration

We will also deal with any queries you may have over your policy cover. Builders, engineers, Crawford's own surveyors and other approved specialists will then undertake the approved repair and remedial works and, if you wish, we can arrange for your insurers to make any payments to them direct. Our adjuster will explain more about these services, if appropriate, during their visit. They are also happy to answer any other queries

Alternative accommodation

An extensive drying out process is likely to be required if your property has been severely affected by flood water. This may mean being away from the property for a long period of time. The provision of alternative accommodation is therefore a top priority. Your insurance policy will usually provide cover in the event of your property becoming uninhabitable due to flood damage. In most circumstances this section of cover would provide for hotel accommodation costs or short-term property lets and additional living expenses. The recent floods have however put great pressure on local accommodation of all types and restricted its supply. Given these exceptional circumstances, alternative accommodation options frequently considered will include: caravans, mobile homes, holiday chalets and serviced apartments or, where possible, staying with either family or friends for which a contribution towards living expenses can be provided. We will of course help you as required in relation to all accommodation options. Again, our staff are there to help with any queries.

Please also advise us if your circumstances change.

Essential contact information

Please make sure that we know where we can contact you, particularly if you have had to move out of your home whilst essential repairs are carried out.

A designated case handler has been allocated to deal with your claim. Please provide the following information whenever you need to contact us:

- Your **allocated** Crawford claim number
- Name of your case handler
- Your contact telephone number
- Your address for correspondence.



Summer Floods Reports

Tewkesbury



Phil Awford

Readers will have seen the devastation caused in Tewkesbury and the wider county of Gloucestershire following the heavy rainfall on 20th July.

I spent the weekend in the Rest Centre set up by Tewkesbury Borough Council together with 380 stranded motorists and evacuees.

In total Tewkesbury accommodated 800 people in various locations across the borough. It was a tremendous effort from staff, community activists and volunteers including residents who took people into their own homes.

It quickly became very obvious that major flooding was imminent given that Tewkesbury is at the confluence of the Severn and Avon.

On Saturday evening I was interviewed on Radio Five Live where I suggested that levels would exceed 1947- our local benchmark flood. Sadly, this proved to be the case and impacted heavily on the town and surrounding areas.

The area then took a further setback as the water supply to 350,000 homes was lost when the Severn Trent water treatment works became a victim and some also lost electricity as well.

I spent much of my time with the emergency planning team and the all intrusive media who invaded the area, but at least I did get to talk with ministers including the Prime Minister when he made a visit.

To the west, Severn-siders are used to flood events but not on this scale and to the east many were flooded for the first time including those who were impacted by flash flooding on the Friday.

A tremendous effort from all sections of the

community saw millions of litres of water distributed on a daily basis and the introduction of portable sanitary equipment to negate the lack of water.

Across the county we had in excess of 5000 properties flooded, in Tewkesbury borough in excess of 1700. Levels have varied from a few inches up to seven feet in the more vulnerable areas.

Those impacted have shown tremendous spirit and stoic resolve in getting on with their lives despite the obvious hardship of being out of their property. Many have been placed in caravans by their insurers as an option to being placed in hotel accommodation for months.

We have worked in the area, setting up information/drop in advice centres for victims, a role that we excel in, and our work has been much appreciated.

Recovery will take a long time, some help is being received through Government and charity aid but it is not enough.

There must be change, planning policy, drainage investment, channel clearing, ditching, and opening up of major floodplains to name but a few.

People deserve to be protected and mitigation and resilience must be to the fore.

Phil Awford

Vice Chairman



Summer Floods Reports

Catcliffe, Sheffield

Catcliffe Floods Again

Flooding in the South Yorkshire village of Catcliffe is not something that has just recently happened. Some residents can remember as far back as 60 years when the "Bottom End" flooded and they had to move their belongings upstairs while waiting for the water to subside. When the water eventually drained away the residents received two bottles of bleach to clear up the mess.

So what has changed in 2000? Catcliffe was flooded again and many residents' homes became victims of the dreaded river's anger. Many of the residents had not recovered from the 2000 floods when again in 2007 they were flooded again.

Why?

In 2000, many people thought that Catcliffe had been flooded to save other areas down river. They understood that floodgates not being activated caused Catcliffe's flood problem. The Environment Agency and the local council do not agree on this point but the residents had to suffer the flood water.

2007

This time residents felt that the water from Ulley Lake caused the flood levels in Catcliffe to rise along with the top water from the massive development site just up the road. The general feelings in the village from residents regarding their homes being flooded are as follows:

- Historical
- Floodgates
- Ulley Lake
- Local Development Site
- Building on Flood Level
- Planners/Developers
- Old Drainage Systems



Some of the above points can only be dealt with by politicians. Flood defence systems obviously cost money; this money can only come from the government of the day. I am sure that many people are aware of the environmental impact of large areas of concrete and tarmac not allowing water to soak away naturally. If the drains cannot cope then the water runs away like a river.

During my time working in the flood centre I have had a chance to speak to a lot of flood victims and quite honestly to see old and young people crying, not able to cope with what has happened to them, is terrible. These people have lost everything, in some cases things they have worked for all their lives, and in a lot of cases do not have insurance to cover the loss. They also don't have any idea when they may be back in their homes with some having to rely on friends and family for accommodation.

The hardships that the people of Catcliffe will have to put up with will go on for several months. If the heavens decide to open again in the same way as they did a few weeks ago the residents will be going through the same procedure as they did 60 years ago, in 2000 and at present. I would like to thank everybody who has helped the flood appeal.

Catcliffe and Treeton Flood Action Group

Burstock - Hull

WE ARRIVED at 11pm in Vestmannaeyjar, a small island off the south east coast of Iceland. I had last been there 41 years ago when I spent two years working on the Icelandic fishing fleet. It was still daylight and I was very happy.

We were woken at 8am with a phone call and the words "Would you want to know if your house was underwater?" ...err no, but I suppose the cat was out the bag.

Most of the day was then spent with numerous phone calls hearing horrendous words like sewage, Environment

Agency, Clough Doors stuck open, pumps in Somerset but not in Yorkshire, boats in our street, furniture floating, police refusing access to residents trying to save their possessions.

We decided that we could do nothing and there was no point in going home until we could at least get near our house.

It was nice to see an old friend from the past who told us of their own disaster when in 1973 their island erupted. They were all evacuated within a few hours to leave their homes

Summer Floods Reports



to burn and be crushed by the weight of the ash on the roofs. 34 years later and you cannot help but notice how the land had been changed by a real disaster and made us think we were more fortunate than my old friends.

A few days later we got word that the water was receding so we headed for home on an earlier flight.

We waded into our house and surveyed the utter mess. We

looked out of our kitchen window and the lower end of our garden was under six feet of water. We did not burst into tears but admit it was close, we had gained a little strength from being forewarned and from our Icelandic friend's recovery after losing everything.

The initial response from the fire brigade, police, East Riding of Yorkshire Council and the Environment Agency varied from fantastic to unbelievably inadequate.

The Fire Brigade manned the pumps day and night, the Police did their security patrols, the council provided a library bus and the Environment Agency did ...err, well eventually it got a pump from Somerset when it was too late and the water had been coming over the top of the banks for over 36 hours. The Environment Agency was just not prepared for flooding by rainfall only perhaps by breach of a tidal barrier and the information was completely confusing. At one meeting we were basically told the Burstwick residents are partly responsible as we use the wrong type of light bulbs. The gentleman who made this out of touch statement only remained alive because the chief of police

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Summer Floods Reports

was sitting at his side.

Now we are over ten weeks on and our house downstairs is just bare concrete blocks, the garden is completely dead but at least the smell has gone. My wife is telling fortunes from the caravan in our front garden and at present we are still married.

We are now receiving good cooperation from the Environment Agency and Dave Pratt of the Willerby office in particular is working very closely with us and has helped us forgive the Environment Agency's initial response.

We must remember that mutual exchange of information benefits all, leads to a full understanding of the events that will form the basis of an in depth report to allow us to go forward.

The close working relationship between residents, councils, Internal Drainage Boards and the Environment Agency are so important.

After we have got over the initial reactions of wanting to point the finger, we are proceeding by mutual cooperation to find solutions to reduce the probability of ever flooding .

Since the flooding we found that the houses that were flooded were built 17 years ago without complying with a recommendation that they should be built up 1.8 meters higher than the land as it was then. We have a large drain under our garden that is completely blocked but nobody knew it was there or can find a plan. The drain is not on our deeds but we should have maintained it. Water comes over the top of the Burstwick drain at 2.57 meters and makes a mess.

Thankfully there are people out their like the National Flood rum who want to help.

Ron Smith

Burstwick

'The Forgotten Village' - North Cave near Hull



As I left for work on the morning of the 25th June 2007 I realised that the rain was heavy. It was heavy enough to wet my shirt just walking to the car but what I hadn't expected was that the rain that day was set to change mine and nearly 10% of village residents lives forever.

I live in the small village of North Cave in East Yorkshire, with my wife and twin boys. The village of approx 700 houses is 12 miles outside the city of Hull, labelled by the press as the "the forgotten city".

can still remember the phone call now from my wife at 10am that morning asking whether I could return home as the lane was flooding outside our house and this was starting to worry her.

We had experienced flooding in the lane before, but

normally when the drains couldn't cope with the storm water and the residents would wade up to their shins and moan that something should be done, but no one ever managed to do anything as we are all busy and we had too much red tape to break through, anyway the water would normally disappear after a couple of hours. If only we had stopped and thought what if

By 4.30pm on the 25th June 2007 I stood in my home with 1 foot of dirty brown water, contaminating and destroying everything that got in its way. How did this happen ? Why did it happen to us ?

These questions were being asked by nearly 80 property and land owners that day in and around the village. The unprecedented rainfall had caused wide spread flooding throughout Yorkshire, but for the national news only Sheffield seemed to matter to the TV crews. It wasn't till nearly a week later did Hull and its 7000 affected properties start to feature in the National press.

So as we began to read about the plight of Hull we all thought it would only be a matter of time before the TV and Radio crews would visit us and allow us to vent our anger and ask to questions as to how this could happen.

The flooding in north cave was primarily caused by the overflowing of a beck and poor drainage. The beck which runs through the middle of the village is one of the villages best assets, such a picturesque place to be sat next too on a summers day, the word cave even means a "fast flowing stream". Little did we know that our major asset would turn

Summer Floods Reports

out to be our major downfall.

It was quite clear to see what was the cause of the flooding, the beck hadn't been cleaned out for nearly 40 years, and over that time vegetation had grown and silt banks formed that quite clearly prevented the flow of water.

As the days went on, and the media drove past our front doors we all realised that Hull was no longer the forgotten city but we would become the "forgotten village". Our MP was off visiting the suburbs of Hull, as we were trying to empty our homes of the water damaged furniture (I bet he will be back when he wants our vote). No-one seemed to notice and care for our suffering.

So enough was enough something had to be done to try and establish why we had flooded and what could be done to prevent this happening again in the future.

A committee was formed consisting of flood victims and parish councillors and a drainage surveyor commissioned to submit an application to the Environment Agency for funding for a scheme under the heading of an MTP or medium Term planning Application.

But with the Environment Agency so clearly under funded and lacking in every department what hope do we have.

We will not know whether our scheme will be successful until December, from which the EA will have allocated the funds but would not expect the scheme to start until possibly 2009. If we fail to obtain the funding its back to the drawing board and fund raising , something has to be done. We all cannot live in fear of being blacklisted by the insurances companies and the value of our homes dropping through the floor.

So we all pray that the heavens don't open again and our cry for funding with the EA is heard but at least this time with the help of the National Flood Forum our voice will be louder.

Philip Garland



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Summer Floods Reports

Ripon

RIPON was one of the first cities to be flooded again in this summer's deluge.

On 15 June, once again the River Skell swept through the city, inundating 50 homes and causing massive damage to businesses - much the same as in November 2000. Many of the homes are bungalows with elderly residents who are particularly vulnerable.

After that previous event, the Environment Agency carried out all the detailed assessment, planning and design for a flood alleviation scheme.

The EA Main Board approved the scheme in 2005, finding it to be both technically and financially sound. Planning permission was granted in 2006.

But where is it? Down the priority pecking order waiting for the Government to come up with more funding!

We really need a system that gives due weight to these smaller schemes and also one that provides some flexibility in funding sources so that there is an incentive for local groups to chase funding to match that provided by central government.



Above all, how can we continue to allow vulnerable people to be exposed to flood risk, where a practical and viable solution is open to us?

Mike Deeming

Skell Residents Group, Ripon, North Yorkshire

Wakefield



In 1997, I personally witnessed the trail of events which led to many homes in Wakefield being flooded. I stood at the place where the River Calder and the Ings Beck meet.

I noticed a clearly visible line consisting of two colours forming inside the entrance of the beck. This line was the clear interaction between the river and the beck.

The colour difference was an excellent indicator, showing clearly how the River Calder was pushing the water in the beck back into the Westgate area of the city centre. It was moving at about ten feet per hour.

Two years after the flood, Wakefield Council and the Environment Agency announced a flood protection plan which clearly stated in the public notice: "TO PROTECT ALL LIVES AND PROPERTY."

When my colleagues and I looked at the plan we saw two huge flaws:

- The Wakefield Sea Cadets and their HQ were not protected.
- The plan did not include a sluice gate and pumping station at the point where the River Calder and Ings Beck met.

Summer Floods Reports

At the planning stage, on behalf of the two affected communities (Wakefield ward 20 and 17) I was the community spokesperson objecting to the planning application with the following reasoning:

I restated the course of events in 1997, highlighting the lack of a floodgate and pumping station, adding the following scenario.

If at the time of the River Calder flooding, whilst the Calder floodwater was pushing the water in Ings Beck back up the beck, it started and continued to rain over the city centre for a day or so, the surface water from the city centre, which normally escapes down the roadside drainage into the Ings Beck, would in effect be the principle and only reason for mass flooding.

The Environment Agency took this matter up; they said they had given it to a firm of hydrologist, who said that my scenario for perceived future flooding in Wakefield was "Out of kilter with reality!"

In other words - I didn't know what I was talking about.

The recent Wakefield floods exacted to the letter what I had warned, the rest is now history. Over 450 homes and the sea cadets HQ flooded because of what can only be described

as gross negligence

Two years ago, Wakefield MDC chief executive, agreed to speak with me about this and other matters. At the conclusion of the meeting he said he would put things right. In the following two years he then decided to refuse implementing any changes to the Wakefield Flood Contingency plans. I then went one to complain to a whole string of people, the list is too long to print here. In a recent letter to me the Prime Minister has stated that he is 'aware of the situation and is taking very careful note'.

Gordon Brown said he is going to listen to communities; I can't fault him thus far, now we need his action.

The frightening aspect is that I feel no learning curve has been gained from the misery of the Wakefield Sea Cadets and 450 flooded homes.

The sluice gate and pumping station still isn't in place. It could all happen again tomorrow, God forbid.

Norman Tate

Flood Voice

Wakefield

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Summer Floods Reports

Worcester

I tried to convince myself that the Environment Agency knew what they were doing – but knowing from the previous flood in June when the barriers were not put up I doubted it!

On the Friday night we went to the local pub for a drink with friends; it was still raining. My wife was becoming more and more concerned about the lack of barriers and ultimately our house flooding for a second time in seven years. We all tried to assure her that even at this late stage the barriers would go up.

A friend insisted that we leave the pub to check out the situation down the road and indeed it was closed off and flashing orange lights could be seen at the low point of Hylton Road – what we believed to be the transported barriers.

We returned to the pub and eventually to our home and bed believing that, if needed, the barriers would go up.

We were awoken by a phone call from our neighbours at 4.30am, our daughter pounced on the phone expecting it to be for her, due to being a teenager and answered it. She brought the phone to us and said it was Lesley who told us to look out of the window.

This was when panic and a gut-wrenching sickness set in. I had no wellies, they had been taken to Glastonbury and not returned.

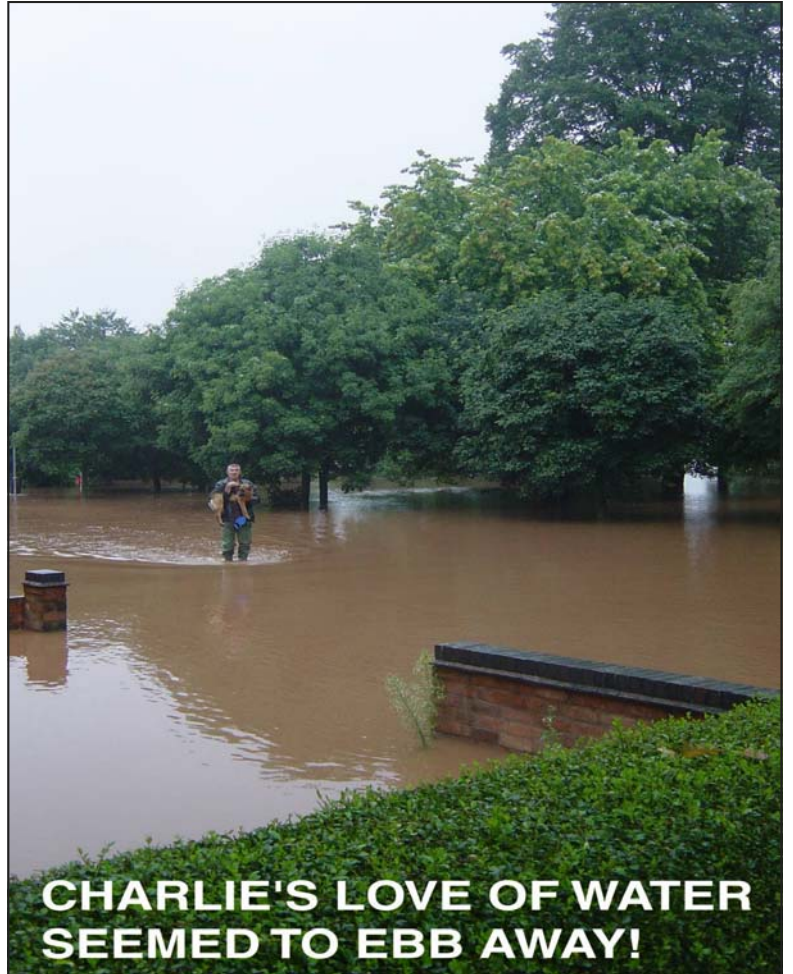
I went downstairs and put on boots and waded into the floodwater to move my daughter's car to higher ground. I returned to remove our car from the garage as the water was about to enter and upon returning the water had risen at an alarming rate – in ten minutes it had risen a couple of inches!

We now began to move what we could upstairs and I rang my brother to retrieve my waders, he turned up and waded barefoot to reach our house. He helped us move what else we could and then we could do no more that sit back and wait for the worst.

We could hear water seeping in from unknown entry points and as the water reached joist level a strange creaking began. Ultimately the water came through the carpets causing white footprints to be left wherever we walked.

Throughout the passing hours I had carried, out of sight of my wife, a bucket as I felt so stressed, physically sick and was shaking due to the knowledge of what the next six months would bring.

We just stood around unable to do any more; our daughter was in tears, refusing to leave her bedroom while our dog



lay on the second step of the stairs not knowing what was going on. She normally loves the water but would not go near it for some well-founded doggy reason.

As for help, one Environment Agency worker trudged through the water offering sandbags but as the water was by now inches deep in our house he was not greeted in a way I usually reserve for visitors.

It was not his fault but the fault of the people higher up who had no idea how to plan for an event like this with barriers kept away from Worcester and a workforce drawn from areas well away from the Midlands - South Wales was mentioned at a recently visited flood surgery!

I can honestly say those few days were the worst in my lifetime – apart from one television interview for the BBC when it came close.

Our faith in the Environment Agency is at an all time low and anything they say is taken with a very large pinch of salt.

We await the building of the clay bank but as everything is 'if we get the funding' we will have to wait and see!

Andy Churchill

Summer Floods Reports

Upton

DEPENDING on people's memories the floods in Upton upon Severn that began on Friday 20 July were not as bad as those in 1947. The plaque on the church wall close to the waterfront was not bested. But, the Environment Agency says not true. These floods were higher on their gauge a little south of the town. The level hit an unprecedented 5.93 metres. To put that in context, those of us who live in New Street begin to get concerned if the gauge level hits 5 metres. In 2000 it hit 5.4 metres and homes flooded.

The ferocity and intensity of the rain that fell caught everyone out. Upton has been using demountable barriers to protect the waterfront and the businesses – mostly pubs – backed by pumps. This has worked well, though the costs of deploying – four times over last winter, again in June when we all got a shock at a summer flood – are a cost the Environment Agency is just managing to bear.

The July deluge brought chaos to roads in the Midlands. The

barriers were marooned where they were stored as transport to get them to Upton couldn't make it through the resulting traffic snarl-up. Lesson learned: store them in the town.

By Saturday the river was rising fast, not from Severn water, but a torrent from the River Teme so powerful that when it joined the Severn at Worcester it created its own barrier. We'd had a taste of Teme water in June. It runs red. The intense local rainfall added to the calamity about to unfold.

By the early hours of Sunday morning, New Street was flooded with homes and cellars under water. People were marooned upstairs. Water had ripped through the riverside properties. It breached a flood 'bund' on east Waterside and swept through properties there. Two caravan parks were as good as destroyed. Vans lay at acute angles. The flood plain beyond the bund – Fish Meadow – was deep under water. Businesses and property skirting the town sports field also got hit.

Through Sunday, Monday and beyond the town was cut off

from the outside world. No way in or out, except by boat. Personally, we lost power for over two days and it was not fully available for two weeks. No power, so no telephone, no radio, no light. Cold showers. At least it was summer. A Walkman and batteries kept us in touch with the outside. Mobile phones kept us in contact, but needed recharging – firemen in an inflatable took on the job. The local guys from Mercia Inshore Search and Rescue worked hard bringing supplies, taking out residents from their upper floors.

The upstairs bathroom became the kitchen. We had gas. We had clean mains water. We rescued what food we could. Eating out of the defrosting freezer. Pasta and sauce. Cooked standing knee deep in water. Every mug of tea meant wading through four foot of water filling the inner hall, then up two steps to the cooking range.

A lot of information we picked up after we managed to get out of the house when the water started to go down. It took most of the week. It wasn't slow to go. At



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Summer Floods Reports

some point we heard the army had been drafted in: SAS they said. There was lots of praise for local radio, but why do these people focus only on road issues? They should be giving out flood level updates.

And, the aftermath? Flooded homes are still being dried out; plaster removal has begun on some. Like others we have had to move out to rented property. It is likely we won't move back for six months, possibly longer.

Television, home and abroad, couldn't get enough of the events. Bad news and trauma always make a good headline. David Cameron, Prince Charles, the Duchess of Cornwall and Hillary Benn all came to sympathise. All good media fodder. My wife Meryl, along with others, became something of a TV regular when the water dropped enough for crews to get their satellite vans down our road.



Our District Council came up trumps. Nothing was too much trouble. Our town mayor Tim Perry was tireless in walking, talking and getting things done. Local heroes, too many to mention. Neighbours pulling together. Watchful as outsiders sniffed around, possibly thieves. As ever Upton bounces back. It always has. Temporary bars and makeshift barbecues were created with the focus on the upcoming August Bank Holiday – our annual Water Festival, when thousands pour into the town.

There is some irony in that New Street formed its own Flood Forum after the June flood. It met on 17 July, three days before the skies opened.

But, there may yet be a silver lining. The Environment Agency was already surveying our piece of Upton to look at building a permanent defence for our street and homes. That

is looking more positive as the days go by. It will be a bund with a sluice type gate to seal the lane that runs into New Street.

Not surprisingly it has our wholehearted support.

Chris Mair

Coordinator New Street Flood Forum

(Chris Mair kindly gave his services to edit the last edition of the NFF Newsletter our sympathies are extended to him for having to write about his own home being flooding in this edition.)

Longlevens - Gloucester

I AM a resident of a modern house on a popular estate in Longlevens, Gloucester. We have been flooded twice so far this year in both June and July. In most cases the water rose in our homes to approximately three feet high. We have lost everything on the ground floor, many cars but worst of all the security of having a home to return to. The impact of losing your home seems to get bigger with time. We are all living, in essence, a temporary life. Generally when you face problems your home is your haven, we have lost our haven in the midst of the most stressful time.

We live next to a once regarded 'innocent' brook called the Horsbere. It originates from a reservoir in another area of the city. Our brook is the only outlet for over-flowing water from three lakes at the reservoir; there is no facility to stop the overflow. With the extreme weather we have faced over the past two months this extra water has poured down our brook like a tidal wave into our homes.

We have a pumping station that has failed on both occasions which has resulted in sewage backing up into our toilets, baths and showers. The pumping station is totally

Summer Floods Reports

inadequate for the number of homes it is supposed to serve and had no back up procedure. The drainage system on our development is sub-standard, which has resulted in the council refusing to adopt our roads. Our drains had not been cleaned in just less than five years, since our homes were first sold. We have stood and watched building bricks and tools being taken out of our drains.

We are spending a lot of time looking into the planning of our development, as there seem to be a catalogue of errors with our properties. I bought my home eleven months ago and no problems were detected and no risk of flooding was brought up in either the survey or environmental searches.

The Environment Agency was staggered when I told them this as their maps apparently detailed our area as at a moderate risk at the time I purchased my home. There is an obvious disconnect somewhere as the process homebuyers rely on clearly was not accurate for myself or my neighbours.

Unfortunately, there are many agencies that have some responsibility for the devastation we are facing; Severn Trent Water, Bellway Homes, the county and city council and the Environment Agency. This is making our fight extremely difficult, as each agency overlaps and unsurprisingly no one is holding up their hands to admit liability or take responsibility.

Another very difficult element of our situation has been the loss of running water for nearly two weeks. Going back to our rented, temporary properties after being in our sewage filled homes and being unable to have a shower was pretty soul destroying.

We have set up a pro-active flood committee and are determined to get answers. If our homes cannot be adequately defended then we will be left with no other option than to push for the builders to buy our homes from us, as effectively our life savings are currently worthless.

Please take a look at our website www.longlevens-flooded.co.uk.

Kelly Bartlett-Haynes



Notes from a Very Small Island in the Thames

An island in the Thames, yet five minutes from the centre of Oxford, Osney Island hadn't been flooded since 1947. Nevertheless, for the first few winters after moving here, my wife and I quietly studied the weather reports and both of us worried when it rained. But after a few years we too pushed the fear to the backs of our minds, after all no one else appeared to be worried. Osney didn't flood. All our neighbours said so. The more winters we survived, the more confident and complacent we also became. Indeed, in April, at our Residents' Association's AGM, when the idea of having a flood warden was mentioned, no one came

forward.

By July, we still had no flood wardens, and no flood plan. The complacency of sixty years was hard to overturn.

After the unbelievably heavy rains of the previous day, my wife and I returned home from a Saturday afternoon stroll to be confronted by the sight of policemen and women going door to door. We were told to expect a flood, and we were given a specific time: 9pm. All of the residents of the three hundred households were ill-prepared.

The events of that evening are a blur, but I remember going into over-drive and being unable to focus on any one task:

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Summer Floods Reports

Notes from a Very Small Island in the Thames

Continued from Previous Page ...

simultaneously I tried to prepare for the flood by trying to find a torch – oh, and better have spare batteries, AND a change of clothes AND find my important papers (but, possibly crucially, not my insurance details) AND try to design and build a door guard for my home, AND also for my elderly neighbour's home AND help my wife as she took on the lion's share of trying to move furniture upstairs. All at the same time. Probably for an hour, I achieved nothing, then, finally managed to focus. By 8pm people were strolling around the car-free streets, waiting for the severe flood, yet there was a surreal, carnival atmosphere. The local pub was beginning to enjoy its best ever few days.

By 8.30 we were told that the flood wouldn't come as predicted at 9pm, but at 11pm; at 10pm we heard it would be with us at 1am; then just before 1am we were told it would be at 6am Sunday morning; then it was to be at 9am. And so it went on. Throughout Sunday there were more official pronouncements of when the flood would come, indeed, more peaks than the Himalayas, but still no flood. The Thames was rising, but so slowly. The complacency of happier times started to return, but then, on Monday morning, one of our near neighbours lost power, then another and then one of our friends told us that the river had entered her kitchen. Then it seemed to stabilise. Tuesday was a gloriously sunny day and we thought that we might have seen the worst. The water wasn't even in the street. We went to bed confident that had seen the worst. We would survive.

But at 2.30am on Wednesday there was a

loud knock at the door: there was going to be a surge, it would be two feet high and we had the order to evacuate. At that time, cold and disorientated we said that we would stay, but looking up the street we saw many of our neighbours join the fire service's trucks and leave. Had we made the right decision?

We went back to bed but slept fitfully. We awoke by 7am and the river was in the gutter; by ten am it was an inch deep across the road and by 11am it was over the pavement. The ground water rose and the back garden was slowly flooding. It was raining. We were in trouble.

By now, we had to wear wellingtons to walk in the street; we knew many people's homes were flooded; the drains in the street bubbled. The water reached the front wall of our house. It rose, maybe a quarter of an inch.

But, did three hours pass without it rising? Yes. By 4pm, the water was off the pavement. Most of us were going to be ok!

About thirty homes were flooded, some to a depth of two to three inches. Other areas of Oxford fared far worse – up to three feet deep in some houses a quarter of a mile away.

I recognise that we were very lucky; we had ample time to prepare (since 1947!) – and so we had time to move cars, lift furniture and build make-shift defences.

Now, our battle isn't against complacency, it's with the local authorities and the Environment Agency as we work for flood defences for our Island. The complacency of sixty years has been well and truly overturned.

Richard Thurston

Osney Island Residents Association

We would be interested in hearing your reactions. Anyone wishing to respond to these articles are more than welcome to contact us at the address opposite.

Whilst the NFF cannot endorse any products and services included in this newsletter we give thanks for the generous support of the organisations concerned.