

HOW TO DEVELOP FLOOD PLANS IN YOUR COMMUNITY





Involving the community in flood planning means they are prepared when the worst happens.

Community flood plans: Improving local resilience

Flooding is one of the most visible impacts of climate change in the UK, and it has become an increasingly prominent issue since December 2015, which was the wettest month ever recorded and saw widespread flood damage across the UK.

Flood planning in the community can include:

- > Compiling a record of people that are most likely to be affected.
- > Looking at preparatory measures with local businesses.
- > Developing emergency plans with the local community who know the area best.

Policy-makers are waking up to the fact that extreme weather events are becoming the new normal – and floods are afflicting some areas with devastating regularity. The impacts of flooding are felt most acutely by people marginalised from society, without the networks to respond quickly, and without the financial resources to recover as easily. Action is needed at all levels, and it is vital that the causes of flooding are addressed urgently.

The role that community groups can play in increasing the resilience of people in their area is substantial. Through engaging those vulnerable to flooding, residents can have a say in how floods are responded to and be part of the solution. Involving the community in flood planning means they are prepared when the worst happens.

Flood planning can include compiling a record of people that are most likely to be affected by floods, meaning that their details can be passed to emergency services and they can be accessed quickly. Looking at preparatory measures with local businesses also helps them to recover more quickly. It is important that emergency plans are developed with the local community, who are the people that know the area best and will be most instrumental in responding to a flood.

Making a difference: Projects in action

Communities Living Sustainably (CLS) is a £12 million, five year programme funded by the Big Lottery Fund. Twelve communities in England have received funding to help deal with the potential impact of climate change and build the sustainability and resilience of their local community, providing inspiration to other communities and sharing what they have learned.

Many of the projects developed community emergency plans in order to be prepared for a flood.

» The Irwell Valley Sustainable Communities Project



The Irwell Valley Sustainable Communities Project is a local partnership based in Salford and led by the Broughton Trust. They had been developing a community emergency plan when the river Irwell burst its banks on Boxing Day 2015, putting their preparedness to the test. They had subscribed 7,000 people to the Environment Agency flood helpline and identified 140 of the most vulnerable people. This allowed the emergency services to access them swiftly following the flood. The project offered comprehensive training to volunteers who visited and engaged with elderly, disabled and dependent people in cafés and community centres. Working in conjunction with the social services in this manner, 40 of the most vulnerable people had been educated about what to do to stay safe in case of a flood.

The response to the flood by the community of East Salford was so exemplary that the project was invited to a reception at 10 Downing Street to acknowledge their good work. The Prime Minister praised all those that had played such an important part in supporting their neighbours, and those most vulnerable in their communities. The project also

surveyed the Irwell flood plain and found that the lack of permeability was a key factor in exacerbating the effects of flooding in the area. They managed to convince Salford City Council to convert 6.5 hectares of land adjacent to the river into wetland, which not only absorbs flood water but also provides a key habitat for birds and amphibians.

>> Sustain Eden

Sustain Eden was a local partnership based in the Eden Valley area in Cumbria, led by Cumbria Action for Sustainability.

They chose to combine educating and empowering local communities with linking vulnerable people to nationwide services.

They developed a phone tree so that neighbours were able to relay warning of a flood in a pre-arranged system. Everyone involved in the scheme is assigned another person to telephone in case of emergency, who then calls the next person, ensuring word gets out quickly.

They also signed up five hundred homeowners to the Environment Agency Flood line, ensuring that businesses continue to function after a flood has also been a key priority for the project.

Several businesses were given individual flood plans and detailed advice on how to stay in business during extreme weather.



>> Sustainable Sheppey

Sustainable Sheppey was a local partnership based on the Isle of Sheppey in Kent, led by Swale Borough Council.

They developed a resilience project imagining the Isle of Sheppey in 2150, by working in stages to produce a plan for the area. The first stage was building knowledge, identifying high-risk areas and groups that were vulnerable to flooding.

The second stage was broadening their working partnership as far as possible to include businesses, NGOs, social enterprises, special interest groups, amenity providers and statutory organisations such as the Environment Agency, Kent County Council and parish councils.

Once this was established, a community emergency plan started to come together. Through face-to-face and online interaction, workshops, events and leaflets, the project gathered feedback from local residents. Following this, 45 actions were put forward to progress resilience in the area, such as increasing awareness of flood risk management and supporting the improvement of surface water management.

Sustainable Sheppey brought together a community emergency plan through:

- > face-to-face interaction
- > online interaction
- > workshops
- > events
- > leaflets

Make it happen:

How can you do this in your own community?

»» Know your stuff

Involving knowledgeable and experienced people gives you a legitimacy and means you are more likely to be taken seriously. Have informed partners with a good knowledge of local resources and services available and develop a strong evidence base. There are plenty of resources available to help non-experts develop a plan; Communities Living Sustainably has produced an information directory to point you in the right direction.

»» Get partners on board

Build relationships with existing groups that are trusted by marginalised people, such as religious institutions and charities. The more diverse a range of organisations you can work with, the more vulnerable people you will be able to reach and the more varied the ideas will be that are brought to the table.

»» Work with local businesses

Small independent businesses are particularly vulnerable to flooding and the impacts of a flood can devastate the local economy. Taking the time to get to know the individual needs of businesses means that they can be much better prepared in the event of a flood. The more detailed conversations you can have with business owners, the more advice you can give around staying open and recovering from a flood. They may also be able to support the community in the event of a flood.

»» Think long-term

An emergency plan needs to be owned and maintained by the community if it is going to be any use. Keep the plan living and evolving, and relevant to any local changes.

In most cases the resources available to community groups are limited in terms of time and money. Partnering with organisations who can drive initiatives forward, this will help ensure they have long term impact. For example in Sheppey the project ensured that management of the plan was handed over to Sheppey Environment Forum after the end of the project, allowing issues to be tackled with an effective, long term approach.

»» Focus on vulnerability

Floods do not have an equal impact on everybody. The more isolated and excluded from society people are, often the more adversely affected they will be and the longer they will take to recover. For a community flood plan to be effective it needs to have input from vulnerable people, many of whom may not be in a position to come along to community meetings. Take time to get to know people, and get them involved in developing messages and tools for other members of the community.

Keeping a list of the most vulnerable and seldom heard people in your area ensures the emergency services can get help to those who need it in case of an extreme weather event.

Help it happen:

How can you support local communities to bring about change?

» Start with the community

If you are responsible for developing flood response, start with the people that are going to be worst affected. A successful flood response should be less about getting roads open quickly and more about making sure the most vulnerable members of society are safe and have the means to bounce back.

» Listen to people

A genuine community flood plan needs real input from the community. This can be a lengthy process and involves building up trust with marginalised and vulnerable people. If they feel like they genuinely have a say, they will be much more receptive to the process. For local authorities or institutions involved in flood planning, factor in feedback from local communities early on. Make sure that residents are consulted and the community plan does not sit apart from other emergency planning but is an integral part of it.

» Commit to the future

Once a community flood plan has been developed it should not take a huge amount of resource to maintain it, but it does need to have somebody responsible for it. For community groups trying to get a plan off the ground, it is immensely helpful to know that it has a long-term future. If you are able to support the plan's ongoing existence, and embed it into your practices, this helps to create confidence and security into the project.

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