

*Editor's Note:* Hello all, summer holidays are still in full swing but this does not mean everyone is off the radar! Have a read of our headline article and I challenge you not to feel touched: this article highlights why we do what we do at the National Flood Forum. We are here to help anyone we can – call 01299 403055 for more information on how. Other articles include a successful dry-run exercise in Keswick, some great community-led works in West Sussex and highlights from a visit from some Dutch students. *With best wishes, Hannah*

HELP!

CALL FOR YOUR **HELP!**

HELP!

For our advocacy work in **insurance** and **planning policy** we need examples that bring to life areas where new build homes have been/will be built in high flood risk areas, in particular **new developments** with surface water issues. If you have anything you can share (text/photos/maps), please email ASAP: [hannah.tankard@floodforum.org.uk](mailto:hannah.tankard@floodforum.org.uk)

HELP!

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## A Battle Against Surface Water Runoff Water Flooding in Swansea



Snapshot from camcorder footage:  
North side - Lake in road and brick wall  
(Photo: PFLAG)

*By Janet Jones (Leader of the Penplas Flood Action Group in Swansea)*

I live on a housing association estate on the North side of Swansea in South Wales. At about 7.45am on Sunday 1st November 2009 my house and five others, along with the gardens of a few other houses, were flooded with up to three feet of surface water runoff.

Our estate is built on the side of a hill. The houses affected were constructed in an old ravine that used to carry rain water down the hillside. From the houses there is a steep bank of steps rising up to a main road. From this point the road rises at both sides. The steps are therefore sited at the base of a hollow. Lining the pavement, from both sides of the

steps, runs a brick boundary wall three and a half feet high. On the other side of the main road is a steep, forty foot high, grassy bank that leads to a grassed playing area equivalent to seven, full size football pitches. The surface of this playing area tilts slightly from both sides into the middle ground and the middle ground itself tilts towards the main road. On the far side of the playing area is a ditch. This ditch runs the whole length of the far side of the playing area and is some ten feet deep in parts. Waste ground on the other side of the ditch rises steeply.

On the morning of the 1st November 2009 there had been very heavy rain. The runoff water built up on the playing area, cascaded down the forty foot bank like Niagara Falls and created a massive lake...

*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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## A Battle Against Surface Water Runoff Water Flooding in Swansea, continued....

...in the hollow whose only outlet was the steps into our estate. Mine was the second house in line for the torrent that forced its way passed my front door to a height of three feet. The next four houses weren't so lucky as, by the time the water reached them it had entered the sewerage system and carried the effluent with it filling the houses with three foot of sewage contaminated water.

No-one could get through on the emergency lines to the housing association. It was, after all, the morning after Halloween! The fire brigade was busy on other call outs. They eventually attended but were helpless since there was no alternative route for the water. They set about clearing the autumn leaves which had clogged up the few street drains under the lake but that made little difference against the continuing torrent.

The residents barricaded the top of the steps with a scaffolding plank, bath panel and Perspex sheeting and the water stopped flooding into the estate but it continued to build up in the road, the single layer brick wall taking the full force of the three foot deep lake of water. There were signs that the wall would not hold. Water shot through gaps in the mortar as if coming through a hosepipe. If the wall had given way the full force of the bricks and the lake would have thundered onto the houses below. Thankfully, the rain ceased, the torrent subsided and after a number of hours the lake disappeared.

**Cake: it is  
hard to say no!**



Everyone was traumatised, adults, children, babies and pets. One resident who'd had a caesarean two weeks prior had to wade through the three feet of sewerage contaminated water, which swamped her living-room, to get out of her house. Everyone was left to their own devices in relocating and/or clearing up except that, for one family, who had nowhere to relocate to, was loaned a dehumidifier by the housing association. Only one household had insurance cover. On speaking with neighbours, I discovered that floods like these had been happening since the estate had been built thirty years prior. One resident recalled thirteen such floods. One neighbour said: "someone needs to do something about this." He was right, but nobody knew where to start or what to do.



**Snapshot from camcorder footage: Water cascading down steps into estate (Photo: PFLAG)**

All the land in question is owned by Swansea Council. I approached numerous representatives of the housing association, and the council, and I approached our Welsh Assembly member and our MP. As a result of all my efforts, two council members came to my home. One laughed as he entered and said: "it was an act of God." My house was surveyed for damage by council representatives and as a result I received a letter from them declaring in black and white that the flood had been an act of God and that the council was not liable.

I spoke to two local solicitors looking for help to get the council to address the flooding and provide compensation. They didn't want to know because I didn't have enough money to pay their fees. One said that they would take my house to pay their fees before we even got to court.

I spoke to Citizens Advice; they said: "contact the National Flood Forum." To be honest, in my complete naiveté I assumed that the NFF only gave advice on how to prevent flooding and I thought there was no way that they would be able to persuade Swansea Council to put effective drainage into the play area or redesign the land so that the water ran off in the opposite direction but, I had tried every other avenue so, in desperation, I rang the NFF.

"Hold a tea and cakes meeting," said Heather Shepherd. "A what?" I replied. Heather explained that we could invite to a meeting various representatives from the housing association, Swansea Council, Welsh Water, Highways and the Environment Agency, we could set the problem before them and see what they would come up with. This concept was mind blowing. I put the idea to

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## A Battle Against Surface Water Runoff Water Flooding in Swansea, continued....

residents who had remained in their homes. They too were totally nonplussed by the idea. Not in our wildest dreams could we imagine such people coming to a meeting in response to our request. Heather travelled all the way down from Shropshire to spend a day with about five of us and she talked us through the concept. With the insight and confidence we received from Heather and, knowing that there was nowhere else to go, with much trepidation, we planned our tea and cakes meeting.

Thankfully, one resident had filmed the cascading flood waters on her phone and had given me a copy on DVD so we had hard evidence. We interviewed a number of local people and learned of a culvert, additional unmaintained drains and manholes and even a road modification all historically provided in the wake of earlier floods. Two locals provided photographs of floods from over 25 years ago. Some of them showed a man in a rowing boat in the lake in the road rescuing people from a marooned ambulance.



Tea: helping path  
the way to solving  
problems since  
time immemorial

I bought a camcorder and set about filming everything I learned about and, in particular, filming the play area during the worst of storms showing where and how the flood water was building up and the way it ran down the bank and into the road at three different points.

Twenty three people attended the tea and cakes meeting. Seven were residents. We presented the problem and the history. I showed a lot of powerful and convincing footage, the final clip being an interview with a seven year old girl who had suffered three of these floods and, a year on from the last one, still cried, and screamed at night, when she heard rain falling. One of the clips showed two red and white road cones down inside a key manhole. During the tea break one of council representatives made a phone call. The cones were removed whilst the second half of the meeting was taking place.

There followed eighteen months of negotiations

with the council during which major drainage improvements were made along with promises of regular drain maintenance. Our estate has experienced no flooding since, despite major storms.

However, I had to continue to monitor all the drains and record their condition on my camcorder and I had to use the footage to prompt the council when the drains were getting overgrown until....this year. This year I've witnessed the main land drain being sprayed with weed killer without my prompting and another land drain which received no recognition in any of our negotiations being suddenly recognised and sprayed. Why this year? Well I don't know, but maybe it's no coincidence that last year the council paid out compensation to some of the residents. The compensation was small but adequate but, the legal costs would have been very high. Yes, I finally found a solicitor who was willing to take on our case. A Cardiff firm called Glamorgan Law: they were brilliant. They took our case on a no-win no-fee basis. I believe they were encouraged by all the evidence we had amassed along with the names and contact numbers of two families who had been resident on the estate and had moved away some twenty five years previously after having been flooded three times and after having received a small monetary compensation payment from Swansea Council. A precedent had been set.

Local residents who remember the days of the floods still keep an eye on the weather forecasts but we no longer have sleepless nights worrying that we might get flooded again. Only occasionally now do I walk the play area and the road monitoring the water and the drains. Our battle for change was long and arduous and we had to battle when we were at our weariest. We are relaxed now. We have been able to replace the belongings that were destroyed, but our greatest comfort is in knowing that parents, children and pets will come and live here and may stay or move on but they will never know what it is like to hear the rushing of three feet of sewage contaminated water approaching their homes to destroy their belongings and traumatise their lives.

*"Thank you."*

One of the facts I learned along the way is that the area we live in is one of the eighth most deprived areas in Wales. Therefore, we are grateful to the National Flood Forum and to Glamorgan Law, organisations who care and are willing to step out and take risks to help others.

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## **Your Opinions sought for Post-Event Flood Assessments**

*Purpose:* To provide guidance on investigating flooding incidents in accordance with the type and severity of flooding. The standard aims to provide clarity and consistency for those involved in investigating flood incidents as required by the Flood and Water Management Act 2010

Have your say before 7<sup>th</sup> September for what you think should be included in a standard for post-flood assessments. To provide your comments you will have to register for an account at: **standardsproposals.bsigroup.com** and search for: **CB/501 Flood risk & watercourses**

## **Environment Agency: Flood & Coast 2016 Conference**

Flood & Coast 2016: a new event to bring together key partners and tackle the big questions in response and resilience to flooding and coastal erosion, is calling for papers and presentations as part of a three-day programme taking place from 23<sup>rd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> February at the Telford International Centre UK.

The conference, led by the Environment Agency, will bring together local authorities, owners of infrastructure, specialists, practitioners and community groups to tackle the big challenges in flood and coastal risk management. The event will also address global climate change and draw on expertise and experience from the UK and around the world.

Exhibition and sponsorship opportunities are available across the three-day programme, which will include workshops, debate and panel sessions tailored to topics selected by the Environment Agency and industry advisory panel.

Flood & Coast 2016 will build on FCRM>10 and previous flood and coastal risk management events led by Defra and the Environment Agency.

Visit [www.floodandcoast.com](http://www.floodandcoast.com) for more information, to submit a paper/presentation abstract or to enquire about exhibiting or sponsorship.

You can also follow the event on Twitter: @floodandcoast

## **Joseph Rowntree Foundation: Flooding and Deprivation**

How can the Government and other authorities improve flood risk management to better support vulnerable sections of society? Flood risk in England is growing, and the public expects the Government to respond to this risk.

A new report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation:

- outlines the relationship between exposure to flooding and social vulnerability and how this creates flood disadvantage for particular parts of England;
- sets out how flood investment could be targeted more effectively to support the communities that may be most disadvantaged by flooding in England;
- recommends how the wider national policy framework could better address underlying social vulnerability in order to increase flood resilience.

The report shows there is no particular alignment between planned expenditure for 2015-21 and the extent of flood disadvantage in a local authority. An example of what it found includes: that only 100 of the 1,493 schemes in the investment pipeline were in these most flood disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

The report suggests that both flood investment and the wider national policy framework could better address underlying social vulnerability in order to increase resilience to flooding.

Its key recommendation is that the Government should review its current approach to flood investment to consider whether issues of social vulnerability or wider deprivation are being adequately addressed, and whether a minimum standard of protection is needed for society. See the full report ([www.jrf.org.uk/publications/targeting-flood-investment-and-policy-minimise-flood-disadvantage](http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/targeting-flood-investment-and-policy-minimise-flood-disadvantage)) for more recommendations on flooding and climate change.

Related to this is the **Climate Just** website with its interactive insights into why some people are more vulnerable to climate change, where they are and what can be done ([www.jrf.org.uk/topic/climate-just?gclid=CISUo8jNuccCFQu4GwodDa4FSg](http://www.jrf.org.uk/topic/climate-just?gclid=CISUo8jNuccCFQu4GwodDa4FSg))

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## From the Netherlands to Netherley

Adapted by Sarah Parkington (National Flood Forum)  
from the original article in the Liverpool Express (23<sup>rd</sup>  
July 2015)

The Netherlands is renowned for its flood prevention work – but a group of Dutch students have been visiting the UK to learn about flood water management here.

During their week-long visit to the UK, the group of Masters' students in water management visited Liverpool. The students learnt from the way the residents of the Woodlands

Estate, Netherley have been engaged with to help manage their own flood risk as part of a Defra-funded Community Flood Resilience Pathfinder project.

The Woodlands Estate has suffered flooding from a mixture of sources over the years, including flooding from the nearby Netherley Brook and surface water flooding. Most recently, six houses on the estate were flooded in September 2012 with devastating effects to the householders.

The Defra-funded project money was mostly spent on providing property flood products to 27 properties that follow the line of the Netherley Brook. Generally houses were provided with flood doors, flood airbricks, non-return valves, brickwork sealant and cement work was repointed where needed. Through the protection works the properties are now much better protected against the flood risk in the area.

Crucial to the success of the scheme was the close involvement with the Residents' Association and the newly formed Flood Action Group. The National Flood

Forum supported the residents throughout the two years of the flood programme and also engaged with a local theatre and schools.



Dutch students with Woodlands Flood Action Group members, National Flood Forum and Liverpool City Council representatives in front of houses recently installed with property flood products (Photo: NFF)

About the Dutch students' visit, local councillor, Claire Glare said: "while the Dutch are masters in large capital water resilience schemes they have less experience of being involved with local residents in smaller projects and the Woodlands Estate showed them what could be achieved."

Jamie Riley from Liverpool City Council's Environment and Emergency Resilience Unit, said: "Community resilience is a

very important strand of work which we continue to promote to ensure that the people of Liverpool are as well prepared as they can be for the risks and hazards that issues such as severe weather present."

The students were informed about the work of the National Flood Forum in other areas of the country, as well as the National Flood Forum's involvement with the project in Netherley. They met with some members of the Woodlands Flood Action Group and were shown the area and some properties that have benefited from the provided property flood products.

The students said they found it interesting to see the difference between the often large capital schemes that The Netherlands specialize in and the more community involved approach adapted in many areas that the National Flood Forum is involved with. They were so impressed that they gave their hosts some delicious caramel waffle biscuits (stroopwafel) as a thank you, which was very much appreciated!

## A Sunshiny Dry-Run in Keswick

By Lynne Jones (Chair, Keswick Flood Action Group)

A nice sunny day in August was probably not the best time to have an authentic feel to a flood exercise but it was really helpful to get together and practice without a crisis!

*Continues on next page...*



Partnership working: KFAG with other partners trialling their Emergency Plan in case of flooding (Photo: Environment Agency)

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## A Sunshiny Dry-Run in Keswick, continued...

Since the Environment Agency built Keswick's new river defences in 2012 and United Utilities relocated and upgraded the sewage pumping station, the flood risk in the town has reduced significantly - but it has also changed. The exercise which took place on 3rd August was an opportunity for flood volunteers to get together and understand how surface water flood risk is likely to be the primary concern in the future and the town's emergency plan has been adjusted to reflect this.



Emergency Plan: Testing the Pumps! (Photo: Environment Agency)

Representatives of the town's emergency services, local authorities, volunteer groups and organisations got together to work through a simulated flood event which had been put together by the Environment Agency's Penrith office. A key part of the exercise was seeing how an additional reception centre might operate. To test the effectiveness as an evacuee centre the local street theatre, along with some willing volunteers, acted out parts as evacuees. As would happen in a real life situation pets were brought along to add to the mix!

Part of the exercise involved closing the flood gates for the river defences, EA staff doing grid runs to check all the local culvert screens and staff from Cumbria County Council operating the community pump which Keswick Flood Action Group purchased last year. It was a very successful day and, aside from being a very useful experience, it was an ideal opportunity to get together, volunteers and professionals, and build the kind of contacts that will be a huge help should the town suffer from another flood event.

## Flood Relief Work on the Manhood Peninsula

By Robert Carey (Chairman, Birdham & Earnley Flood Prevention Group)

Since its creation just over two years ago, the Birdham & Earnley Flood Prevention Group (FPG) has worked closely with the Environment Agency (EA), the County and District Councils and the National Flood Forum to help relieve flood risk on the Manhood Peninsula in West Sussex. We also work closely with parish councils and residents groups. The FPG has always had a wide and varied membership (currently 14), with a strong project based approach. In all we have managed or are managing 11 flood relief projects, with each project led by a small sub-group of between 2 and 4 members. To date 5 projects have been completed, 2 are in progress and 4 are at the planning stage.

A major success, in collaboration with the EA and the County Council, was the construction of the Bookers Lane Flood Alleviation Channel: a 450 metre long new waterway which meanders from Bookers Lane to the north to join the new Medmerry Estuary and nature reserve. This waterway, along with its island and small wetland area and two road crossings took two years to complete at a cost of over £500,000, including some £45,000 of funds raised from local residents.

We have also recently been busy working with the EA on major works to improve the 2km stretch of the Grange



Bookers Lane Culvert (Photo: Robert Carey)

Rife ("rife" meaning stream in the West Sussex dialect) in nearby Almodington village. Here we have managed to remove over 40 metres of restrictive culverts and replace them with open channels. Besides the benefits in terms of water flow, this work has resulted in an improved nature corridor for wildlife. With over £50,000 of County Council Operation Watershed grant, we are now working with the EA on Phase 2 of the Almodington project, which involves diverting water away from the village.

In Birdham Village, our members have worked closely with the parish council and with Operation Watershed funding, to implement a project to replace 150 metres of damaged and restrictive culvert running under residents' gardens with a new open channel in a nearby field.

A lot of work for all but the results are worth it!

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