

Buckingham Flooding Newsletter

April 2009



When there is extreme flooding predicted, the third level or 'Severe Flood Warning' will be issued which still applies to the areas listed above but also includes 'Fishers Field, Nelson Street, Hunter Street, Well Street, Ford Street, Stratford Road and Wharfside'. Residents in these areas should not receive the Flood Warnings.

For more information on flood warnings or to register to receive them, please visit the Environment Agency's website at www.environment-agency.gov.uk or call Floodline on 0845 988 1188.

DEFRA flood protection grant scheme

The Department for the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) have launched a pilot scheme of grants to assist in the installation of property level flood protection. This is a small-scale promotional scheme aimed at increasing the number of inspectors able to survey properties and to advise on suitable protection measures and the range and quality of protection products available.

AVDC has submitted an application in respect of 114 Buckingham properties which are known to have flooded in either 1998 or 2007. We should know whether we have been successful by the end of April. The potential grant monies are in three sections. For each qualifying property, the council could get a grant of £500 to cover the cost of a survey, £4,500 towards the cost of implementing the identified works and £700 towards the councils costs in administering the scheme.

Our application for more than 100 houses is therefore seeking funding of more than £600,000. However, there is only £2 million available nationally for this round and £3 million for the second round in the autumn. Since this scheme is aimed at creating pilot, or demonstration, projects DEFRA are likely to fund more, smaller, projects rather than just three or four larger ones.

One of the major elements of the grant scheme is that there has to be significant community engagement throughout the process, that is, encouraging flood victims to work together and with the council to find appropriate solutions. We have started this through discussions with Buckingham Town Council and by getting in contact with a number of flood victims who are now working to promote the creation of a flood action group. Such a group is essential to facilitate the decision making process and to help disseminate information about the scheme.

Flood Warnings – Recent Changes

Those of you who have registered to receive flood warnings from the Environment Agency (EA) should have received information from them about the recent changes to the warning areas.

The first level of warning is **Flood Watch**. This means that flooding of low lying land and roads is expected. It continues to cover the whole of the Upper Great Ouse in Buckinghamshire & the River Tove in Northamptonshire. That is, everywhere in the river catchment upstream (north and west) of Newport Pagnell. This service is normally only provided to riverside land owners, boat owners, etc if explicitly requested.

The second level of warning is **Flood Warning**. This means that flooding of properties is expected. The old 'Upper Ouse' warning area has been split and there are now separate flood warning areas for two small parts of Brackley (east and west) and for Buckingham town. The Buckingham area covers the full length of the town and is described as 'from Brackley Road to Bourton Park, including Chandos, Ford Street, Cornwalls Meadow and the Wharf'.

If the application is successful, the next step is for AVDC to work with the residents' group to employ surveyors to inspect the properties which flood. They will report to residents and AVDC identifying the specific flood risks and advising on the appropriate protective measures for each property. These may be door boards, air brick covers, etc.

Throughout the process we need to maintain contact between residents, the community group and AVDC. Through this process a decision will be reached on which equipment to purchase before the council places orders for their supply and installation. After the works, a further inspection is required to ensure that all the advised works have been satisfactorily completed. Only after all this can AVDC claim the grant funds from DEFRA.

It is possible that any grant received will be insufficient to fund all the required works. Additional funds may need to be found from other sources. The Regional Flood Defence Committee (RFDC) (which would have paid for the upstream storage works had that been a viable proposition) have already committed to investigating the feasibility of funding a complementary scheme irrespective of the outcome of our application to DEFRA. With 114 potential properties to protect and limited funding available, residents may also be asked to contribute to the cost of works to their property. The overall cost of works and the source of funds will only become clear as the project proceeds.

There may be some properties which it is not possible to protect from flooding, probably because of the way in which they are constructed. For these properties the appropriate action would be to make them more resilient so that they are easier to clean and repair after they have been flooded.

Residual Risk

It is important to emphasise that even if all the at-risk properties are protected with the recommended measures it does not mean that the properties will never flood again. Firstly, measures such as door boards have to be erected when flood warnings are issued. Secondly, the equipment will need to be properly looked after, cleaned, stored and maintained by the householder as the



manufacturer recommends. Lastly, there is always the possibility of an extreme flood which exceeds the design limits of the protection measures.

What if there is no grant?

Should the application be unsuccessful this time there is a second opportunity in the autumn when a further £3 million is available for grant aid. Should we still be unsuccessful the community group would become even more important in pressing for other flood defence funding in the future. In other parts of the country it is the tireless efforts of local groups that have teased out funding for flood protection measures. The same could be achieved here.

Flood Action Group

The purpose of having a community flood group is to promote self protection and to lobby for help and funding in the way that only affected residents can. It can also bring people together to offer assistance to one another during an incident. A number of your neighbours have already started working together to encourage you to take part in this initiative. If no one has contacted you yet then maybe you need to start discussing it with your immediate neighbours and then to speak with:
Liz at izad@btinternet.com 01280 817137 or
Lewis at mail@buckinghamfloods.org 01280 824998.

The district and town councils are able to assist but this needs to be a community initiative acting on behalf of residents rather than a council led group. Have a look at websites such as floodforum.org.uk and floodplanuk.org to see what others have done and what help and guidance is available.

An active local group will be essential to progress a successful grant aided scheme or to lobby for other funds. After any works are completed the community group should continue to meet to share experiences, provide mutual support and to educate new residents.

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Photos courtesy of Cllr Derrick Isham

This leaflet was compiled by AVDC with assistance from the Environment Agency and delivered by Buckingham Town Council.