

Winter Preparations Newsletter

December 2015

1. Introduction

This annual newsletter provides an update on what the authorities have been doing across West Berkshire over the last year. It also contains advice on what you can be doing **NOW** to ensure you and your community are prepared should there be flooding, snow, ice and/or storms.

Whilst a lot of the activity by the various authorities is 'normal' winter preparations, it should be noted that following the winter of 2013/14 and the publication of the Council's [Winter 2013-2014 Debrief Report](#) there is a greater impetus by all. There were 60 recommendations in the report and at the time of writing over 50% are completed with many more progressing well. Some of the recommendations are for the authorities. However there were some for communities and individuals to do and in part this newsletter is to encourage those actions to be pursued.

2. Winter Preparations

A number of winter/flood specific meetings have taken place recently to ensure all agencies and communities are preparing for winter. Whilst we know winter comes around every year, these meetings give us all an opportunity to consider our readiness afresh and to share what developments have taken place by way of positive changes and perhaps, more importantly, any limitations to what we can do. These meetings have included a West Berkshire multi-agency meeting for key authorities in the area including the Council, Thames Valley Police, Thames Water, Canal and River Trust, Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service, Sovereign Housing Association and the Environment Agency.

Throughout the year there have been over ten Flood Forum meetings where officers from a number of agencies have attended. We now have six Flood Forums in the area including – Pang Valley, Lambourn Valley, Streatley, Purley on Thames, Newbury and Thatcham. There are also over 85 Flood Warden/Community Resilience Volunteers covering 26 communities with flood risks. This year we held the annual Flood/Community Resilience Volunteers Teleconference on 27 October with representatives of 11 communities taking part. Feedback again has been positive as it provided a useful test to establish if teleconferences could be used at times of flooding, or indeed any other emergency, with the key stakeholders in the community.

3. Met Office Update

The Met Office's long-range outlooks give probabilities based on scenarios of being considerably wetter or drier, colder or milder than usual.

Currently the outlook for November 2015 to January 2016 suggests that milder and wetter than average winter conditions are slightly more likely than other outcomes.

The Met Office's long range forecasts are an emerging and cutting edge area of science and provide useful information on the possible conditions averaged over a three month period. It is a probability based forecast to highlight the possibility of conditions varying away from the climatology. It cannot provide any specific detail on any elements of the weather such as the amounts of rain or snow.



West Berkshire
C O U N C I L

There are many factors that can affect our weather and how they interact with each other can have an impact on expected conditions. The majority of the news headlines this year have been around El Niño which has been the strongest since 1997-98 but in itself does not affect our weather although it can slightly increase the probability of a positive North Atlantic Oscillation (NAO). This in turn can be associated with milder and wetter weather across the UK. Other factors also suggest a positive NAO which is also associated with spells of windy or stormy weather.

The current three-month forecast covers the November to January period, so cannot really be used to give an idea of the 2015/16 Winter as a whole. However, here is what the latest forecast suggests.

Temperature: The forecast suggests a higher probability of temperatures being in the warmest of the five categories (25%) than the coldest category (15-20%), averaged over the three months.

Rainfall: The forecast suggests a higher probability of conditions being in the wettest category (35%) than the driest category (15%), averaged over the three months.

Summary: The forecasts suggest a higher probability of a warmer and wetter November to January period and there are currently no signs of widespread, heavy snow as predicted in some newspapers. The Met Office forecast cannot specify the potential severity, duration or timings of specific events.

Below are a number of useful links from the Met Office:

[Get ready for winter](#) – a really useful website full of information pulling together information and advice not only on weather but keeping healthy, travel and planning for events.

[Latest UK weather forecast](#) – Keep up to date with the latest weather forecast. Note this is soon to go to a seven day forecast and not just five days.

[National Severe Weather Warnings](#) – Keep up to date with the latest severe weather warnings.

4. Environment Agency Update

Status for November: Total rainfall for November (up to and including 24th November): 56mm = 84% of monthly standard average

River levels: The past week has remained unsettled, although generally rainfall has provided no significant input to the River Thames. All other river flows generally remain below their monthly means.

Soil Moisture Deficit: soil moisture deficits have fallen slightly but remain close to average for the end of November.

Groundwater levels: sites vary from below normal levels to normal levels for this time of year.

Monthly updates are provided on the [water situation report - south east](#) on the Gov.UK website. Please look at the West Thames document on that link for these updates.

Below are a number of useful links from the Environment Agency:

Improved numbers registered for our flood warning service: Over 500,000 people are signed up to get flood alerts and warnings directly. There is still a gap however, so the Environment Agency has been working with mobile phone companies to try to get more people signed up. This work is ongoing. However in the meantime anyone who is in an area liable to flooding is encouraged so register to get alerts. [Sign up for flood warnings](#)

[Live River Levels Information](#) – this webpage has been improved following feedback from users.

The service will now show data for the past 5 days with additional explanations about how the levels are monitored, how regularly they are updated and what the measurements mean.

5. Canal & River Trust Update

The Canal & River Trust have 34 locks, 29 sluices (four of which are automated) and 16 weirs in the West Berkshire Council area. They have a team of operatives responsible for water control and a volunteer group on standby to deploy the warning sleeves on to the locks in times of flood.

6. Repairs and Flood Preventative Works

Repair work and flood preventative work continues across the District by Thames Water, the Environment Agency, West Berkshire Council and the Canal and River Trust. Some of the works have included:

- Removal of approx 10 tonnes of rubble and debris from under a bridge in Eastbury – working with Flood Wardens and the community as they maintained the river along the stretch of the Lambourn.
- Clearance of a Highways drain in Lambourn and removal of more debris from under the road bridge in Newbury Street.
- The Highways and Transport Service have cleaned the stream culvert under A338 by the garage and further downstream in Great Shefford.
- The Environment Agency has completed the flood alleviation scheme in Eastbury and built a flood bund in Purley on Thames.
- Thames Water has carried out extensive work along the sewer network in the area, particularly in the Lambourn Valley (Lambourn, Eastbury, Winterbourne), Pang Valley (West Illsley, East Illsley, Compton) and Newbury (Station Road). This work involved:
 - undertaking CCTV surveys of the sewers to check for any blockages
 - cleaning the sewers to remove tree roots and blockages
 - relining sewers to prevent ground water infiltrating into the sewers
 - sealing manhole chambers to prevent surface water from entering the sewers
 - servicing sewer pumping stations to keep the sewers flowing.

Many more have been undertaken and others are in the pipeline to be started as soon as time and funding allows.

There has also been some excellent work by individuals and communities – clearing ditches, reporting concerns to the relevant agencies including Riparian owners have cleared the B4001 ditch from Mile End all way down to Northfields on east side.

7. Contingency Planning

Every winter, every flood is different since the conditions will never be exactly the same which means that planning can be challenging. In order to overcome this the Council has been working on some specific projects:

- (a) Revised the **WBC Adverse Weather Plan**. This plan covers all types of adverse weather from heatwave to extreme cold. The plan provides the background and information which has been learnt over the years providing those who need to respond to an adverse weather

event the tools to consider the many different issues which may arise. It also provides other agencies with information as to how we will all work together. This plan links with many other plans we have including the Major Incident Plan, Vulnerable People Plan etc.

- (b) **Flood Asset Management Register.** A new database of flood related assets e.g. bridges, culverts, ditches etc; who owns these assets; when they are checked and what the implication of that asset is in flood/adverse weather conditions has been developed. The database also holds the details of previous flooding and adverse weather events. It is a 'living' developing database which will be of use to the Council and other responders before, during and after a flood event.
- (c) The [Winter Road Treatment](#) – this is the annual plan in relation to the treatment of the road network in cold and snow conditions.

8. Community Resilience

It was clear in 2013/14 due to the wide scale nature of the flooding that the Council, nor other agencies, could be everywhere at once to provide support to all communities. It was also really noticeable that in some communities, particularly where they had a community plan that the support provided by the community for their own community in emergencies was very much welcomed aiding those in the community and the responding agencies.

Work has been continuing across West Berkshire, and indeed Berkshire, developing opportunities to support individuals, businesses and communities to support themselves. This has led to some more support by way of guidance and information being made available on the Councils website including community plan templates and home emergency check lists [Emergency Planning - Are you Ready?](#)

There are also opportunities for financial support for communities who develop community plans in relation to resources/equipment. Two sources of grants available at the moment include:

- (a) [SSEPD Resilient Communities Fund](#) – up to £20,000 is available. The next date for submissions is April 2016.
- (b) [Berkshire Community Foundation](#)
- (c) [Greenham Common Trust](#)

Other opportunities may also be available locally so keep an eye and have a wish list ready! As an example – Eastbury tapped into the Waitrose community projects.

Volunteers supporting their communities have been given recognition of their efforts by the Courts by way of Social Action, Responsibility and Heroism (SARAH) legislation more information can be found on the link: [Courts to recognise good intentions of volunteers and small businesses](#) .

9. Specific Community Resilience Actions

(a) Property Level Protection

Since the floods in 2013/14 the Council has been administering Government grants in relation to businesses and residential properties which were flooded. The table below sets out the detail.

No of businesses supported	25	Business grant funds provided.	£50,000.00
No of residential property applications approved	99	Residential grant funds provided	£454,113.33

We know however that more than 124 properties flooded therefore even from the last flooding event there are still properties in the area that are still at risk of flooding.

It is perhaps worth noting that the Council nor any other agency is responsible for protecting individual homes from flooding it is instead the property owners responsibility – similar to protecting your property from fire, theft etc. As a result we would actively encourage anyone with a property in a flood risk are to investigate how they can protect their property at times of flooding.

(b) **Vulnerable People**

Did you know that almost all utility companies run schemes to support vulnerable/priority users should the utility fail for whatever reason. Vulnerable people in this case normally means people with underlying health conditions, disabled or have special requirements based on the utility e.g. needs power for dialysis.

However before they can support them they need to know they exist. So the vulnerable person or their carer should register them with the utility companies – you do need to register with each one – power, water, gas, phone companies etc.

We would therefore encourage everyone to encourage the vulnerable in the community to register now so additional support can be provided if needed.

(c) **What you can be doing NOW to be prepared for flooding this winter**

- Check if you are in a flood risk area.
- Sign up to the Flood warning service.
- If you are in a flood risk area then prepare a flood plan for your property including property level protection.
- Consider any property level flood defences NOW.

(d) **What your community can be doing NOW to be prepared for flooding this winter**

- Prepare a community emergency plan
- Nominate Community Emergency Volunteers and/or Flood Wardens.
- Prepare a communications plan in your community – an email group, community social media account, places where newsletters/posters can be put up on where people can get information.
- Check all ditches and culverts in your area and make sure they are clear of rubbish and not blocked. If they are then ask the owner to clear them.
- Check that rivers and streams are clear of rubbish and other obstructions. If they are blocked contact the riparian owner and ask them to clear it – or you could organise a community event to clear them. (You may need permission and advice from the Environment Agency to clear main rivers).

(e) **Useful Information and Websites**

- [Canal & River Trust](#)
- [Environment Agency - Flooding](#)
- [Highways England](#) for information on traffic problems on the main roads [click here](#)
- [Met Office](#)
- [National Flood Forum](#)
- [Scottish & Southern Electricity](#) – SSE have recently sent a leaflet called *What we do for you* to all of their customers to give them information about SSE, raise awareness of their Priority Service and provide contact information. They also created a leaflet, which is available on their website, about *Preparing for Winter*. Both leaflets can be found [here](#).
- [Thames Water- Tackling sewer flooding](#) – TW have also prepared a leaflet called [What to do if sewage floods your property](#).
- [West Berkshire Council - Emergency Planning and Community Resilience](#)