

## **BODENHAM FLOOD PROTECTION GROUP**

### **REPORT TO THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING** **(11 MAY 2015)**

#### **FLOOD RISK**

We have been extremely fortunate over the past 12 months in having had adequate, but never excessive, rainfall and at no time have had any major concerns about the risk of flooding. Indeed, there have only been three occasions (26 November, 12 December and 15 January) on which even the first (0.5m) alert was triggered on the early warning telemetry system in the Millcroft Brook.

#### **GROUP ORGANISATION**

At the AGM on 26 August 2014 the members of the Committee and all the Area Representatives generously agreed to remain in post, thus ensuring continued stability for another year. At the same time Mr Tony Clark also kindly volunteered to ease some of the Secretary's and Operation Manager's workloads by assuming responsibility for the Group's stocks of sandbags and for monitoring the state of local watercourses, a task colloquially known as 'walking the brook'.

#### **MONTHLY MEETINGS**

As always, the Group's Meetings on the last Tuesday of each month have been very well supported, with an average attendance of 30 members.

#### **FLOOD PRECAUTIONS**

**Working Parties.** The lack of any immediate flood risk did not mean that the Group could afford to become complacent. A full 'season' of working party sessions was conducted in 2014, with an average of 12-15 members attending every alternate Friday evening from April to October to cut back vegetation and clear stream beds. The main effort, as always, was devoted, first, to the Millcroft Brook, which was heavily overgrown in its upper course through the Village and heavily silted in its lower reaches upstream of the Ketch Lane culverts, and, second, to the Orchard Close drainage system where, once again, the clearance of vegetation took several evenings of hard work. Working parties have already started again for the 2015 season.

#### **Environment Agency.**

Although the relief channel at Millcroft Farm was constructed as long ago as August 2007, followed by the widening of the adjacent Brook in early 2008, these changes to the local topography have never been reflected in the Agency's mapping. This is an important omission because the whole purpose of these works was to reduce the flood risk, not only to Millcroft Farm, but to neighbouring properties upstream along the Millcroft Brook. It could be expected that this, in turn, would have the effect of reducing insurance premiums for the properties concerned.

The Group therefore raised this issue with the Environment Agency and an Agency team eventually surveyed the relief channel on 7 August 2014. In due course a revised assessment of the flood risk to

Millcroft Farm was received stating that this is “low”. However, it remains to be seen whether the survey will make any difference to the Agency’s mapping of the local flood risk and, if so, how long this will take to appear.

**River Lugg Internal Drainage Board (IDB).** The IDB re-surveyed the relief channel at Millcroft Farm on 23-24 March this year to assess the extent to which it had become silted up over the 6½ years since it was constructed. Their contractor then spent three days (25-27 March) removing the accumulated silt and restoring the channel’s profile. As already mentioned, the relief channel plays a key role in reducing the flood risk to the whole western end of Bodenham Moor in two ways. First, in severe weather, when the culvert at Millcroft Farm is surcharged, the channel takes excess water away and deposits it safely back in the Millcroft Brook further downstream; second, when the River Lugg is in flood and water cannot escape through the Ketch Lane culverts, the lower part of the relief channel ensures that water is diverted across the flood plain, rather than back up the Brook. The Group is therefore extremely grateful to the IDB for its continued interest in, and maintenance of, the channel.

**Balfour Beatty.** The Group has continued to develop its contacts with Balfour Beatty and, in particular, with their Locality Steward, Mrs Donna Tregenza. She has been very supportive and, although much remains to be done, for example in repairing drains and flap valves, we would like to record our thanks for all her efforts on our behalf. We have, in turn, offered our own help to Balfour Beatty, for example in putting out and taking in flood signage, when required.

**Sandbags.** As usual, during last summer the stocks of sandbags, both those held in cages and those on private premises, were checked and repaired or replaced as necessary. This resulted in the central reserve of both empty bags and filled sandbags being depleted and so Balfour Beatty were asked to provide 200 empty and 300 filled bags to make good this deficiency. This caused some initial difficulty when Balfour Beatty questioned whether this was their responsibility, but they were eventually persuaded that it was and fulfilled the request, for which we were most grateful.

## **FLOOD RISK INSURANCE**

The passage of time since the floods of 2007 has meant that most local residents have now resolved any flood risk insurance issues that they may have had and the frequency of requests for help and advice on this score has greatly reduced. However, we continue to do what we can to provide it, where necessary and look forward to the time when the new Flood Re scheme comes into operation later this year.

## **OUTSTANDING ISSUES**

**Inadequate Culverts.** As mentioned in previous reports, the poor design and inadequate capacity of the Ketch Lane culverts and the partial blockage of the ‘Pugh’s Field’ culvert remain the Group’s main concerns. These have been raised with Herefordshire Council on a number of occasions, but we have yet to receive a response.

**Flood Reporting and Signage.** Similarly, we have still not received any response from Herefordshire Council to the Group’s offer, made over a year ago, to assist with the flood reporting and signage.

### **Proposed Housing Developments.**

Recent proposals for housing developments in Bodenham Moor and the effect these might have in increasing the already substantial risk to parts of the Village, such as Orchard Close, have been, and

remain, of great concern to the Group. Members have generally accepted the requirement in Hereford Council's emerging Core Strategy for Bodenham Moor to accommodate some 40 additional houses in the period up to 2031. They have also been supportive of the draft Bodenham Neighbourhood Plan's preference for these houses to be located in the field opposite England's Gate Inn, a preference partly based on an assessment that this will not increase the flood risk to other nearby properties. The same is not true of Shuker's Field where Bovis Homes are proposing to construct 49 houses and where there is real concern that such a development would increase the already significant flood risk to neighbouring properties in Chapel Lane and Orchard Close, worsen the risk to Brook House and Eastfields/ Gravel Farm and make it even more likely that the adjacent pumping station will be flooded and raw sewage will be released into the surrounding area and, *via* the Moor Brook, into the River Lugg.

On 12 June 2014 the Chairman, the Secretary and Mr David Tilford met the civil engineer contracted by Bovis Homes to carry out a flood risk assessment for their proposed development. They walked the entire area with him, including the drainage system West of Orchard Close, explained the history of flooding in the vicinity and highlighted local concerns and the very real reasons for them. However, this seemed to achieve little since the flood risk assessment eventually produced in support of Bovis Homes' planning application is clearly flawed and inadequate, while Bovis Homes' representatives have been simply dismissive of any related concerns expressed to them.

On 17 March the BFPG submitted a letter strongly objecting to the planning application, as did a large number of the Group's members individually. It remains to be seen what the outcome of this application, and of one by Bell Homes for the development of the field opposite England's Gate Inn, will be.

## **EXTERNAL CONTACTS**

### **HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCIL**

Sadly, one of our greatest supporters, Cllr Jeremy Millar, has decided to move away from Herefordshire. This will be a great loss because, for the four years that he has been our Ward Councillor, he has been an unfailing source of useful information, help and advice. He was instrumental in arranging the visits of two successive CEOs of Herefordshire Council, which gave us the opportunity to raise issues of concern at the highest local authority level. He provided us with links into, first, Amey Herefordshire and more recently Balfour Beatty, which had the effect of raising the Group's profile with them and easing the way to gaining their assistance. This was of critical importance when 'Project Bodenham' was in danger of stalling and Cllr Millar stepped in to arrange a meeting with Amey Herefordshire which ensured that the project got back on track to a successful conclusion. We would like to record our thanks to him for all that he has done for the Group and to wish him well for the future.

### **RESEARCH**

#### **Convergent Volunteers Project.**

As reported last year, the Group was invited to contribute to a Defra-funded project conducted by Warwick University's Business School into how best use can be made of 'convergent volunteers', *i.e.* those volunteers who turn up without prior warning to offer their help during a flooding emergency. Two researchers visited the Group's working party session on 27 June 2014 and took on the role of convergent volunteers themselves by helping in the task of clearing silt and vegetation from the bed of

the Millcroft Brook. They then joined the Group for refreshments afterwards which gave them the chance to talk to individual members about their experiences and motivation in volunteering.

The Project Team subsequently sent the BFPG their full draft study report for comment. This ran to some 130 pages and drew on evidence in academic literature on the handling of volunteers, as well as examining how other countries tackle the issues raised by convergent volunteers in emergencies. So far as this country is concerned the Project looked at three case studies – Bodenham after the July 2007 flood and Boston in Lincolnshire and Tonbridge in Kent during the floods of December 2013. The Bodenham case, of course, showed volunteers coming together after an emergency and trying to prevent a future one by proactive work, not least by physically clearing watercourses. The other two case studies were very different in nature and scale; Tonbridge had over 250 houses flooded and Boston about 1800. The draft Report made a number of recommendations, but most of these are not directly applicable to Bodenham because they are aimed at government and local authorities. Nevertheless, there were some lessons for us to learn, and we have commented on it fully so far as the BFPG is concerned.

### **Surveying for Flood Resilience in Individual Properties.**

The Secretary was invited to join the Board of the Defra Project “Surveying for Flood Resilience in Individual Properties” which is aimed at encouraging wider use of property level flood protection (PLP) “by developing a cohort of competent surveyors”. The research is concentrating on the training and assessment of surveyors who will provide the initial risk assessment of properties, rather than those who will look at the actual installation of flood protection equipment in houses.

The Secretary attended the first Meeting of the Board in London on Wednesday, 29 October 2014 as a ‘consumer’ representative. This was followed up by e-mail correspondence to which she has also contributed. Owing to another important commitment she was not able to attend the second Board Meeting on 12 February 2015, but took part in discussion after the meeting by e-mail.

### **Participatory Geographic Information Systems for Flood Risk Communication.**

The Group received an e-mail in February this year inviting it to contribute to a research project being carried out by a MSc student at the University of Leicester on ‘Participatory Geographic Information Systems for Flood Risk Communication’.

There is a move towards getting citizens to take more responsibility for where they live and how they manage the associated risks, to tap into their detailed knowledge about local flooding, and to allow them to get involved in making decisions about how local flood risks are managed. Taking advantage of advanced software and the internet, Participatory Geographic Information Systems provide the means for achieving all of this, although the technology is not yet fully developed and there are many pitfalls in how it is applied. The Secretary completed an on-line questionnaire on behalf of the Group.

### **Involvement of Volunteers in Achieving FCRM Outcomes.**

In October 2013 the BFPG was approached by Forest Research, who had been tasked by the Environment Agency (EA) to look into the working relationship between the EA and voluntary workers and groups working with, or for, the Agency. The Chairman and the Secretary completed an on-line questionnaire and then a member of the research group, Dr Bianca Ambrose-Oji, attended the BFPG’s Meeting on 26 November 2013 and spent some time talking to members. She was keen to find out why,

after some 5 years since the 2007 floods, the Group still functioned, why members had volunteered in the first place, and what they each got from being a volunteer. She subsequently sent her draft report to the Secretary for checking.

Nothing further was heard until, on 16 March this year, the Environment Agency announced the results of this and much other research under the heading of “Investigating and Appraising the Involvement of Volunteers in Achieving Flood and Coastal Risk Management (FCRM) Outcomes”. This consists of five reports which can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/investigating-and-appraising-the-involvement-of-volunteers-in-achieving-flood-risk-management-outcomes>

The fourth of these reports includes four case studies, of which the BFPG is one. These are all very different, but are interesting both for their diverse approaches to mitigating flood risk and for their many similarities (such as the predominance of retired volunteers and those living in rural areas, the apathy of the general population, the issue of insurance, and so on), as well as some of ideas they produce. (Bodenham’s case study is at Section 4.8.4 and is illustrated with photographs and quotes from BFPG members).

**Flood Resilience at a Community Level in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands.** On 2 April 2015 we received an e-mail from Steven Forrest, a PhD Researcher on Flood Resilience at the University of Groningen, in which he invited the Group to take part in an on-line survey. This was part of a four year research project being conducted by an international team based at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands and Westminster University in England. The research is funded by the University of Groningen and is focussing on ways of increasing flood resilience at a community level in both countries. The present survey was aimed at obtaining a better understanding of the status of flood groups across the UK and their roles in local flood risk management and in community resilience to flooding. It was completed by the Chairman.

## **TRAINING**

### **Northamptonshire Flood Resilience Community Pathfinder Project.**

In December 2012 Defra launched the Flood Resilience Community Pathfinder scheme backed by £5M of government funding. As a result 13 projects have been established across the country with the aim of encouraging local communities to come up with innovative ways to reduce the flood risk to their localities. Northamptonshire is one of the local authorities taking part and has funding of £384,030 for their project, of which some £299,150 is coming from Defra.

The County has 15 parishes involved and held a Training Day for these Pathfinder Groups on Saturday, 15 November 2014. A total of 26 volunteer flood wardens drawn from across these communities attended and the Chairman and Secretary were invited to talk about the work of the BFPG under the heading “*Real Life Flood Events and Lessons Learned*”. Mrs Mary Dhonau, who was leading the seminar, introduced this presentation by saying that the whole countrywide Pathfinder Scheme was based on the example set by the BFPG.

The Training Day proved to be very well organised and interesting. There was a great deal to be learnt from the other presentations and, in particular, from that by the member of Northamptonshire County Council leading the Council’s work on flood protection and resilience. Her work on developing the Council’s flood protection website was especially impressive and she said that she would be very willing to share her Council’s ideas and experience with the relevant members of Herefordshire

Council. This offer has been passed on to Herefordshire Council, but it is not known whether it has been taken up.

## **EXTERNAL PUBLICITY**

### **BBC Radio Hereford and Worcester.**

Although not directly relating to the BFPG, the Secretary was interviewed by Nicola Goodwin for the BBC Radio Hereford and Worcester early morning programme on Thursday, 14 August 2014 on the subject of the proposed developments in Bodenham Moor. She emphasised that Bodenham is not a NIMBY village, but that there is grave concern that new developments will not address the local flooding and sewerage issues adequately.

At just after 5.00pm on Thursday, 29 January this year the Secretary took part in a live interview by Jonathan Ray on the Andrew Easton programme to discuss remarks made by Hilary Benn, the shadow Communities Secretary, on the subject of planning.

## **SOCIAL EVENTS**

**Annual Barbecue.** The Annual Barbecue was held on Saturday, 28 June 2014 at Willow Cottage, Maund Bryan by kind invitation of Mr and Mrs Schwartz and some 40 members and guests were given the unusual treat of Canadian style spare ribs and other barbecue fare in very pleasant surroundings.

**Annual Bonfire Party.** The Annual Bonfire Party was held at Millcroft Farm on Saturday, 27 September 2014 and was attended by 35 members.

**Annual Quiz Night.** The annual Quiz Night was held on Friday, 14 November 2014 in the Parish Hall. In a very enjoyable and successful evening some £335 was raised for BFPG funds. Once again particular thanks must go to Mrs Anita Griffiths and Mrs Maureen Bick and their team for making all the arrangements and to Mrs Tricia Sanford for again acting as Quizmaster.

**Annual Coffee Morning.** The Group's annual Coffee Morning was held on 14 February 2015 in the Siward James Centre and was again very well attended, raising just over £400 towards the Group's work. As always, we are extremely grateful to everyone who supported us so generously and, in particular, to Mrs Liz Davies and her team for making the event such a success.

## **SUMMARY**

Once again, this has been a busy and most successful year for the Group and sincere thanks must go to the Environment Agency, to Balfour Beatty, and to the River Lugg Internal Drainage Board for their support, as well as to Cllr Jeremy Millar for all he has done for us as Ward Councillor, and to Mr Rod Hawnt and the Hydro-Logic Group for their continued and generous maintenance of the telemetry system. However, as always, the key to the continued success of the Group has been the enthusiasm and hard work of its members. Accordingly the greatest thanks go to all those who have continued to support the Group, whether by taking an active part in working party sessions, by attending and contributing to meetings, by helping to organise social events, or by lending their support in any other way.

K.A.M.

**BODENHAM FLOOD PROTECTION GROUP**  
**2014/15 Committee and Area Representatives List**

**Chairman/ Operations Manager: Cllr Tony Mitcheson**  
**Treasurer/ Secretary: Mrs Babs Mitcheson**

**The Moor:**

<b>The Moor Road:</b>	<b>Mr Tony Clark</b>
<b>Orchard Close/ Chapel Lane:</b>	<b>Mr Robert Pritchard</b>
<b>Brockington Road:</b>	<b>Mr Simon Dowler</b>
<b>(2 -31&amp; 35)</b>	
<b>Brockington Road:</b>	<b>Mrs Rebecca Burnill</b>
<b>(1, 32-34, 36 – 42A)</b>	
<b>Brockington Road (43- 54):</b>	<b>Mrs Gwen Bowden</b>
<b>Siward James:</b>	<b>Mrs Victoria Paterson</b>
<b>Ash Grove Close:</b>	<b>Mrs Jean Fryer</b>
<b>Ash Grove View:</b>	<b>Mr David Harris</b>
<b>Ash Grove View:</b>	<b>Cllr Alec Avery</b>
<b>Millcroft Road:</b>	<b>Miss Barbara Gibson</b>

**Bodenham Village:**

<b>Bridge to War Memorial:</b>	<b>Mr Mike Mullenger</b>
<b>Church and Bodenham Village:</b>	<b>Mr David Ayshford Sanford</b>

**Maund Bryan:**

**Mr Philip Broomhead**