



The Work of a Community-led Flood Resilience Group

A 'How To' guide, designed to help communities
with the formation and operation of a
community-led Flood Resilience Group

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Introduction

This guide is based on the experiences of the Swallowfield Flood Resilience Group (FRG), during their journey to understand the causes of flooding in their parish and the development of their response to it.

It is not a definitive guide that will work everywhere and should not be seen as a 'one size fits all' approach to assessing and addressing the risk of flooding in all communities. It is presented as just one example of how one community approached the issue, in the hope that other communities can benefit from their work. The whole process has taken nine years so far and the group is still working hard.

The guide starts with a brief history of the Swallowfield FRG, describes the seven stages or phases of their work and ends with some resources that may prove useful.

History of the Swallowfield Flood Resilience Group

The Swallowfield FRG was formed following significant flooding in the parish in 2007. In response, a public meeting was quickly called by Swallowfield Parish Council, at which all attendees were asked to draw on a map or write about their experiences of the flood and the flow of water across their land.

A small group was formed to collate the information, identify areas of damage and to initiate discussions with the Environment Agency, Thames Water and Wokingham Borough Council. This swift response encouraged an equally swift response by the authorities and helped the group to make decisions on remedial work required.

The group met regularly, becoming a focus group able to monitor progress and hold authorities to account. Working groups were formed to clear ditches, inform people of the importance of proper drainage, undertake mapping exercises and engage with farmers and other landowners. Regular articles were written for the parish magazine and formal reports were presented to every parish council meeting.

Over time, the group was formalised and linked to the parish council. Regular attendance by officers from Wokingham Borough Council and other organisations at meetings of the FRG facilitated a two-way exchange of information. The group has now become more strategic, working on plans to improve drainage flows and seeking expert help.

In 2014, the FRG sought help from the Community Council for Berkshire (CCB). They were interested in finding funding for the creation of an emergency plan and for a research project to identify the principal causes of flooding in the parish and what potential solutions might reduce the risk of future flooding. CCB was successful in a series of bids to the Berkshire Community Foundation's Berkshire Flood Recovery Fund to support this work, the key outcomes of which are:

1. The creation of an Emergency Plan for the parish
2. The commissioning of a professional flood risk appraisal for Swallowfield detailing key causes of flooding in the area and identifying appropriate solutions
3. The distribution of bespoke advice to all households setting out specific risks that affect them and how they should respond to flooding

4. Supporting other communities to follow the example set in Swallowfield
5. Creation of a smartphone app and web-based mapping tool that can help communities build up a history of flooding in their area, map assets or problem areas and provide alerts during flood events

In February 2016, CCB delivered a training event at Swallowfield Village Hall on the use of community venues as emergency accommodation. The event was funded by Scottish and Southern Energy's SEPD Resilient Communities Fund. The training included information on this grant programme offered by Scottish and Southern Energy, to which Swallowfield Parish Council successfully applied for £8,000 to spend on emergency equipment for the parish.



Forming a Flood Resilience Group: General hints and tips

The following points were raised by members of the Swallowfield FRG and are offered as general advice to consider when forming a group or starting out on a flood resilience project.

- Form a small group to start with and build it up from there
- Start small. Don't try to do everything at once
- Build momentum as confidence grows and more members are recruited to the group
- Prioritise the steps you feel most comfortable tackling
- Develop an action plan and work through it methodically
- Don't feel that the scope of your project has to encompass everything described here
- Different communities face different kinds of risks, so approach the process from your own perspective
- Don't feel that the plan has to cover the whole area of a particular parish or community. Focus on areas of greatest risk and cover lower-risk areas later on.
- Develop a comprehensive list of key stakeholder individuals and organisations both locally and further afield that can support the work of the group. The stakeholder list should include the local MP, the local authority, the National Flood Forum and the community liaison officer at the Environment Agency
- Ongoing communication with the parish council, the wider community and key stakeholders is crucial to ensuring a wide understanding of the ambitions and progress made by the group

The Seven Steps

Following a review of the work undertaken by the Swallowfield FRG since its formation in 2007, their progress has been summarised in the following seven steps. They are presented in a specific order, as some activities only make sense in the light of the completion of previous ones. However, as previously stated, the steps should not be seen as definitive and it may make sense for different groups to find their own order of activities and to approach the activities in a different way.

1. **Form a group.** The group should be independent from the town or parish council, however good participation from local councillors is important. Work done by an independent group will have greater credibility and freedom than a sub-committee of a local council. An open public meeting is a good way of introducing the topic to the community and recruiting volunteers.

2. **Recruit specialist members** where possible with experience of:
 - a. Engineering
 - b. Building
 - c. Drainage
 - d. Environment
 - e. Local knowledge of flooding and local topography
 - f. Other interested members of the community prepared to get their hands dirty
 - g. At least one parish councillor and preferably a number of about one third of the group
 - h. Local farmers and/or landowners
 - i. Local businesses
 - j. People with experience of working with statutory and emergency services.

3. **Develop a terms of reference**, including
 - a. An information sharing protocol between the group, parish council, wider community and key stakeholders, including sections on:
 - i. Careful use of social media
 - ii. Involvement at local community events
 - iii. Reports submitted to parish council meetings

- iv. Reports submitted for publication in local newsletters and magazines
 - v. General messages circulated around the community to make people aware of the group and its current activities
 - vi. Communications schedule to inform key stakeholders of the group's formation, followed by regular updates.
- b. Membership (the group should be open and approachable to new members)
 - c. Meetings: frequency, location, secretariat etc.
 - d. Scope of the group: just flooding or to also include other emergency scenarios
 - e. List of stakeholder organisations that should be involved, such as the local water company, the Environment Agency, Local Authority, relevant Catchment Area Forums etc.
 - f. Training and/or information events to keep all members up-to-date with processes, plans, protocols, use of equipment, emergency procedures etc.
 - g. Where important evidence, maps, research and other documentation should be kept (perhaps retained by the parish council or clerk but with ownership resting with the group)
 - h. An example template for a Terms of Reference document can be found in Appendix A.
4. **Create an emergency plan**, either just for flooding events or to cover wider emergency scenarios.
- a. Look for examples of what others have done
 - b. Chose a template recognised by statutory authorities (see Appendix B)
 - c. Consult widely with the community to promote the cause and to attract volunteers. It is very important to promote the group and its work widely and to explain its intentions
 - d. Inform statutory and emergency services and authorities. Seek their support
 - e. Find ways of keeping it up-to-date and dynamic, so that it remains useful and relevant
 - f. The process of compiling an emergency plan is in some ways more important than actually having one. All the questions asked during the process will highlight short-comings and help identify issues that had not come up before.

5. **Develop a schedule of assets**, natural and man-made, that play a part in the movement of water around the area.
 - a. Consult with the community to learn from peoples' experiences. Let them tell their stories and feel included in the process
 - b. Understand the ownership of all assets
 - c. Create a list of all equipment and resources held within the community
 - d. Locate and understand all pinch-points: ditches or drains prone to blocking etc.
 - e. Highlight the most important or critical assets or areas that can cause flooding
 - f. Find an appropriate way of recording all of this information. You might like to consider using the Berkshire Flood Alert portal described in Appendix E.
 - g. Identify areas of concern and work with the owners to develop improvement plans
 - h. Develop a good working relationship with statutory authorities, especially those responsible for drainage and roads, with a view to influencing their improvement plans
 - i. Develop a schedule of monitoring and maintenance:
 - i. Groups of volunteers could regularly walk the area looking out for blockages, high water and other issues.
 - ii. More formal inspections of specific ditches, culverts, drains etc. can be made by appropriately skilled people, who can also investigate reports from the volunteer groups
 - iii. See Appendix D for an example
 - j. Draw up a checklist of regular inspections of equipment and resources to ensure that all remain in serviceable condition

6. **Consider investing in professional analysis of water flows** in the area, such as a Flood Risk Appraisal based on data, topography and flow analysis to formalise existing risks. The report should:
 - a. Summarise evidence of flooding
 - b. Identify potential causes of flooding
 - c. Outline potential solutions to overcoming flooding using existing assets
 - d. Recommend other solutions to evidence future funding bids for new assets
 - e. Undertake Micro and Macro analysis using the report:

- i. Micro analysis will facilitate the work in step 7
- ii. Macro analysis will support engagement with neighbouring areas and help to develop new projects to improve flood resilience in the area
- f. Use the data to make fact-based determinations on questions of development, future land use etc.

7. Develop information and advice for all properties, domestic and commercial, that could be affected by flooding in the area. The advice should:

- a. Explain the nature of the risks they face
- b. Describe the measures that they can take to protect their property
- c. Provide generic advice on what to do in an emergency
- d. Present the information and advice in a format that has longevity and will be easily found in an emergency
- e. Consider including this information in any welcome pack provided to people moving into the area.
- f. An example of the kind of information that could be produced can be found in Appendix C.

Appendix A: Developing a Terms of Reference

There are many templates available that can help with setting out a Terms of Reference (ToR) for a group. This is just an example and each group should develop a ToR that meets their needs and contains only information of relevance to them.

Name

Formal name of the group or group.

Purpose

Describe the purpose of the group, when it was established, why it was established and what it aims to achieve.

Authority

Describe the decision making authority of the group, including who can make decisions, approvals and/or recommendations.

Membership

Describe the type and number of members, how members are appointed and how the chair and co-chair are appointed. List the members (Name and any functional role). Describe how other groups and/or organisations will be represented. Note any restrictions on the length of membership.

Meeting arrangements

Describe the frequency and location of meetings, meeting procedures, quorum, details about agendas and minutes (how these will be distributed, made available online, who prepares them, etc.), and any communication between meetings. Also address whether meetings are open to the public and whether anyone may participate.

Reporting

Describe to whom the group will report, in what format and how often.

Resources and budget

Describe the available resources (people, rooms, equipment, etc.) available to the group. Describe any funds available to the group and the basis by which they can be spent.

Deliverables and working methods

Describe what the group will actually do. Describe what it aims to achieve and whether sub-groups or working groups are required.

Communications

Describe how the group will share information on its activities and achievements. Consider how confidential information will be handled.

Review

State the ToR review frequency and next review date. Describe how the group will review the relevance and value of its work.

Appendix B: Emergency Plan Template

The Swallowfield FRG used a template provided by Wokingham Borough Council, which is also used by other local authorities in the area. The template can be found by clicking on **Community Emergency Plans** on the Wokingham Borough Council website at:

<http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/community-and-safety/emergencies/prepare-for-an-emergency/>

The website provides guidance on creating an emergency plan and provides contact details for officers that can help.

Appendix C: Household information and advice

Once bespoke household-level information and advice has been created for Swallowfield Parish, the template and standard text will be reproduced here.

Appendix D: Maintenance and Monitoring Schedule

Two sample monitoring and maintenance schedules are shown below.

Description of Flood Relief Management Strategy		Q1 Work Planned	Q2 Work Planned	Q3 Work Planned	Q4 Work Planned	Weed cut by hand	Weed cut by machine	Maintain channel	Obstruction removal	Environ management	Grass cut by hand	Grass cut by machine	Vermin control	Tree work	Defence repair	Flood reservoir work	Maintain structure	Condition inspection	Operational inspection	System monitoring	System operation	Planned maintenance	Unplanned works	Reliability works	
		This system includes The River. We will undertake selective operational inspections, routine vegetation maintenance and obstruction removal on these channels to improve flow dynamics and reduce flood risk.	Channels																						
Raised defences																									
Structures																									
Non FRM assets																									
Operability																									
MEICA assets																									

MEICA: Mechanical and Electrical, Instruments, Control and Automation

FRM: Flood Relief Management

Where	What	Who	Schedule	Activity	Last Check	By Whom
The Meadow	Ditch	Parish Council	Monthly	Remove Obstructions	01 October 2016	The Clerk
Back Lane	Ditch	Landowner	Monthly	Remove Obstructions	05 October 2016	John
Main Road	Ditch	Landowner	Quarterly	remove Obstructions, cut back hedge	01 September 2016	David
The Oaks	Balancing Pond	Parish Council	Annually	Cut back vegetation	06 September 2016	The Clerk
Fern Glade	Balancing Pond	Landowner	Annually	Cut back vegetation	01 May 2016	Mike
The Rec	Ditch	Landowner	Monthly	Remove Obstructions	15 October 2016	Sam
Top Field	Ditch	Landowner	Monthly	Remove Obstructions	15 October 2016	Sam

Appendix E: Community Flood Alert Portal



Using funding provided by the Berkshire Community Foundation's Flood Recovery Fund, CCB commissioned a smartphone app and associated online mapping tool designed to promote better understanding and more accurate reporting of issues and resources related to flooding in Berkshire.

Developed to promote early logging of flooding data, CCB's tool intends to improve the level of information available to affected communities and the agencies that serve them.

The tool can be used in a number of ways, including:

- Creating a historic representation of flood events affecting the community in the past
- Detailing all assets within the community that are available during times of emergency
- Identifying the location and ownership of all ditches, gulleys, drains, rivers, balancing ponds etc. within the community
- Enabling anyone to report issues such as debris in ditches or flood water encroaching on a road or footpath

The online portal can be found at: <https://floodalertberkshire.skhosting.co.uk/>

The smartphone app is available on Android and iOS.

For a demonstration of how the tool works, please contact Tim Parry at CCB via email at tim.parry@ccberks.org.uk

Thanks and Credits

The Community Council for Berkshire would like to thank the Berkshire Community Foundation for awarding funds from the Berkshire Flood Recovery Fund to support this work.



All of the members of the Swallowfield Flood Resilience Group should be congratulated on their work since the formation of the group. Without such a dedicated group of volunteers, people living and working within Swallowfield Parish would face much greater risks than they do today.

The Flood Resilience Group would like to thank Lee Atkins, who chaired the group from its formation in 2007 until he moved away in 2016. The fact that Swallowfield's FRG has gained the credibility it enjoys is largely because of Lee.

This guide has been produced by the Community Council for Berkshire with help and assistance from members of the Swallowfield Flood Resilience Group.

CCB (Community Council for Berkshire) is an independent charity and Rural Community Council. CCB's mission is to strengthen, promote and empower communities in Berkshire. We give people the skills and confidence they need to play a full part in their communities and encourage them to become active citizens. We do this by providing information, advice, support, training and personal development to individuals, groups and organisations within the voluntary and community sector. Working in partnership with government, local authorities, private and voluntary sectors, CCB delivers a wide range of projects that have a positive and long-lasting impact on communities in Berkshire



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