

Cam Valley

Floods Update

Issue 3

Update on Section 19 Investigations

Since the last Update, there have been various community meetings connected to the Council's "Section 19" Flood Investigation process. We are grateful to all who gave up time to attend and for all the comments and suggestions. Anna Meares, who is writing the reports, expresses her profound gratitude for your help in making sure that the data and information she has is now telling the complete story. On this basis, the technical analysis has now occurred and the reports are being written up. Publication is expected next week.

Cam Valley Community-Based Flood Warning System

If you have witnessed or experienced flooding at first hand, you'll know that time becomes an even more precious commodity during such an event. There's just so much that could be done as waters rise; furniture balanced on tables or taken upstairs; cars moved to higher ground; sand/gel bags positioned and the list goes on. There never seems enough time.

Working in conjunction, the Somerset Rivers Authority and the Environment Agency are securing more time for Cam Valley residents. As part of a wider pilot, the past few months have seen the installation of new river level gauges at Yarlinton, Blackford, North Cadbury, Weston Bampfylde, West Camel and Bridgehampton.

These gauges are being calibrated (which requires a few rainfall events so that warning levels can be appropriately set) and training on a new web-based platform to accompany the gauges has been conducted with representatives from each parish. Further refinement is needed, but the gauges and associated web-platform (<https://cfh.aquaticinformatics.net/AQWebPortal>) are operational. The data is presented in various forms (maps, tables, charts) but you may find the dashboards the easiest way to keep track on your local gauge. We hope it is intuitive to use, but please speak to those who have been trained from your Flood Group / Parish Council in the first instance, if you're experiencing any problems using the platform.

Community Emergency Plans

As a community-based system, these gauges have been intentionally designed to issue alarms that trigger action according to a Community Emergency Plan. These consider in advance how a community can respond in an emergency. They consider likely risks, the resources a community has at their disposal to help and how best to be organised to respond well.

Thanks to everyone who has attended recent workshops on flood planning held by the Somerset Rivers Authority, Somerset Council and the Environment Agency. Following these, Cam Valley parishes are working on developing and refining their Plans.

We'd encourage you to check with your Parish Council/Meeting about progress and ask to see a copy when it's ready, so that you can be aware of its contents and perhaps even add some suggestions and finishing touches.

If any Parish or community hasn't yet been able to attend this training or needs additional support, please contact somersetprepared@somerset.gov.uk.

Natural Flood Management (NFM)

NFM is key to reducing flood risk and partially mitigating effects of climate change. The measures introduced aim to protect nature, restore biodiversity and mimic the natural function of catchments and floodplains to store more water on the land and slow its flow. By spreading a flood event over a longer period of time, the peak height of flood waters and, therefore, their detrimental impact is reduced. Measures include tree planting to soak up water and hold soil together, soil improvement to improve water retention, river and floodplain improvements such as woody leaky dams, reconnecting floodplains through ponds and storage features and better management of field run-off using scrapes, bunds and sediment ponds.

The Environment Agency and the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group South West staff are engaged in the Upper Cam Valley to identify NFM opportunities. Working closely with communities, key partners, farmers and landowners, a portfolio of potential land management, river and floodplain opportunities across the catchment is being built. Priority will then be given to schemes that deliver greatest protection to properties and livelihoods, with funding for delivery likely to come from various sources, including the Somerset Rivers Authority. If you would like to find out more contact:

roy.hayes@fwagsw.org.uk

Riparian Responsibilities & Carrying Out Work on a Watercourse

On the subject of land management, did you know that if you own land adjacent to any watercourse, you are very likely a 'riparian owner'? Unless explicitly excluded in your title documents, common law presumes that you own the bank and bed of the watercourse on your boundary to the centre of the channel. Riparian owners have certain rights and responsibilities. They should protect wildlife, prevent pollution and pass on water without obstruction, including clearing debris and removing large overhanging branches which could cause an unnatural increase in flood risk.

More information on the legal rights and responsibilities of riparian owners can be found here: www.gov.uk/guidance/owning-a-watercourse.

The Environment Agency has recently produced a new guide available here:

<https://engageenvironmentagency.uk.engagementhq.com/your-watercourse-rights-and-roles>

For any work in or around a watercourse, it is your responsibility to contact the relevant authority to check if any consents or permissions are required. Who to contact depends on whether your watercourse is designated as "main river" or not, which you can check here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/main-river-map-for-england-proposed-changes-and-decisions>. For "main river", the relevant authority to contact is the Environment Agency (wessexenquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk), otherwise you'd need to check with the Lead Local Flood Authority at Somerset Council (llfa@somerset.gov.uk).

Highways Update

In the floods last May, the force of water was such that roads lost their surface, many ditches filled in and some bridges were damaged. In the intervening period, the Highways team at Somerset Council has been busy, with the following works directly related to the flood event:

- Clearing affected roads in the immediate aftermath (often working in conjunction with local landowners), including from landslips
- Road sweeping, jetting and clearing out gullies that had become blocked
- Additional 800m of ditches cleared
- Approximately 946 sq mtrs of new tarmac laid in North Cadbury and Yarlinton parishes
- Temporary repairs to the bridge at Wales so that it can be used by light traffic until such time as it can be fully repaired (scheduled for spring)
- Inspections carried out at other bridges. This includes the bridges at Stoke Lane in Yarlinton and at Cary Road in North Cadbury, where required remedial works have been identified. Quotations for this work are currently being sought.