

Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee

12 March 2025



Reading
Borough Council
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Title	January 2024 Flood Update Report
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report status	Public report
Report author	Sam Shean, Highways & Traffic Services Manager
Lead Councillor	Cllr Karen Rowland, Lead Councillor for Environmental Services & Community Safety.
Corporate priority	Healthy Environment
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. That the Committee notes the progress of the recommended actions set out in the 'January 2024 Flood Event Options Report' presented and approved at Policy Committee on 8th July 2024.2. That the Committee approves the updated Sandbag Policy set out in section 3.15 and Appendix 3.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The Council is the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) as set out in the Flood & Water Management Act 2010 (FWMA) and has a duty to investigate and report all flood events findings using a Section 19 report.
- 1.2. Section 19 of the FWMA states that on becoming aware of a flood in their area, the LLFA must investigate (to the extent that it considers to be necessary or appropriate), which Flood Risk Management Authorities (RMAs) have relevant flood risk management functions and whether each RMA has exercised, or plans to exercise, those functions in response to the flood.
- 1.3. Schedule 2 of the FWMA amends other Acts and under the amended Section 14A of the Land Drainage Act 1991, LLFAs have the power to carry out works to manage flood risk from surface water runoff, groundwater and ordinary watercourses, where the work is desirable having regard to the 'Local Flood Risk Management Strategy'.
- 1.4. The Council responded to a flood event in January 2024 and reported to Policy Committee in July 2024 with recommended actions. This report sets out the progress on the agreed actions by the Council, as well as the options to reduce flooding, and the 'lessons learned' following a review of the incident.
- 1.5. The Council has reviewed and updated the Sandbag Policy following the January 2024 Flood Event and made amendments, as set out in 3.15. The revised Sandbag Policy is recommended by officers for approval, (Appendix 3 refers).

2. Policy Context

- 2.2 The Council Plan, 'Investing in Reading's Future', reflects the Council's priorities for Reading and provides direction for staff in delivering services to meet the needs of the communities within the Borough whilst working within allocated budgets. Relevant Council Plan priorities include;

- To secure the most effective use of resources in the delivery of high quality, best value public service.
- To make travel more secure, safe and comfortable for all users of the public highway.
- To provide a public highway network as safe as reasonably practical having due regard to financial constraints and statutory duties.

3. The Proposal

Background to January 2024 Flood Event

- 3.1. The Reading area was impacted by flooding in January 2024 arising from the River Thames, River Kennet and Holy Brook, and associated ditches and tributaries of these watercourses.
- 3.2. The main contributing factor to the flood event was above average rainfall levels in the three months prior to January 2024 (up to 150% above the long-term average), in combination with a period of intense rainfall in early January 2024 caused by Storm Henk.
- 3.3. High rainfall levels on a saturated catchment led river levels at the River Thames at Reading gauge to rise to their highest recorded level since the major flood event of 1947.
- 3.4. During a period of 6 days, commencing 6th January 2024 the main river and ordinary watercourses capacity was exceeded from natural flood, saturated ground conditions and extreme prolonged rainfall, resulting in low-lying land and property being flooded within the RBC administrative boundary. 21 residential properties, three commercial properties and one static residential caravan were flooded, due to rising water levels in the River Thames, River Kennet and tributaries.
- 3.5. Of the flooded properties reported to the Council, 10 residential properties were impacted internally by flooding from the Christchurch Ditch, (known locally as the Gos Brook or Danall Brook), 4 residential properties from the Holybrook which was exacerbated by localised surface water drainage problems and a further 4 residential properties from the River Thames including 2 properties at The Warren, Caversham.
- 3.6. The Council commissioned Stantec to investigate and produce a Flood Options Report, (**Appendix 2 –Reading Flood Investigation - January 2024’** refers) and a list of recommended actions was agreed.
- 3.7. It should be noted that Danall Ditch runs along the southern border of private properties in Queens Road Caversham and the Council own and managed land on the southern side of the ditch. Responsibility for the Danall Ditch falls on the frontages (the adjacent properties) who are responsible for their entire boundary frontage to the centre of the Danall Ditch, (this includes the multiple properties on the North side and the Council for the length of the south side. Where the Danall runs into the Culvert under Heron Island the responsibility for the culvert lies with the landowner, although the Council remains responsible for ensuring it is flowing.
- 3.8. The responsibility for flooding from main rivers cuts across several agencies and private landowners. The Environment Agency have the ultimate responsibility for Main Rivers including the Thames and Holybrook, although property owners also have a responsibility to protect their own property.

Actions agreed following the January 2024 Flood Event Options Report

3.9 Lower Caversham area:

Recommended Action	Date completed	Further Action
Carry out CCTV survey of the closed section of Christchurch Ditch from the footbridge at the eastern end of Hills Meadow to the Heron Island outfall point, to investigate its state of repair and capacity (under Heron Island private ownership).	Survey Completed Jan 2025	No further action. The culvert was cleaned and all debris removed, the CCTV found the culvert to be in good condition.
Review if there is any requirement for localised repairs to the footbridge at the eastern end of Hills Meadow and/or wingwalls following removal of the tree and review the need for localised repairs to damaged banks	Completed October 2024	Added to bridge inspection programme. Principal Inspection programmed in for 2025/26 financial year.
Installation of a trash screen to the culvert at the eastern end of Hills Meadow, to capture debris before it enters the closed section of the culvert and improve the ease of future clearance works	Agreed to install / In progress	EA consent underway, works to deliver April 2025
Establishment of a checking/maintenance schedule for the ditch.	Completed October 2025	On Annual inspection
Installation of a level gauge board at the eastern end of Christchurch Ditch to provide a visual indicator of water levels and potential flood risk to residents.	Agreed to install / In progress	EA consent underway, works from April 2025
After the water levels in Christchurch Ditch had returned to normal post-flood levels, local residents noted some fallen blocks in the ditch close to the footbridge at the eastern end. This should be reviewed, and repair works carried out as necessary.	Agreed to remove / In progress	Removal of loose blocks / boulders Programmed for April 2025 when the trash screen is being installed to the Culvert running under Heron Island

Additional works included the following:

- A 'Deep Clean' of Queens Roads and a parking suspension to clear parked cars in November 2024 so that all road gullies could be inspected and tested and any necessary maintenance works, and road sweeping was carried out. All road gullies found to be clear and in good working order.
- The cleaning of the Culvert running under Heron Island was completed in early January 2025 and was found to be in good working order once the silt & debris was removed.

3.10 Southcote / Kennet Meadows area:

Recommended Action	Date completed	Further Action
Investigate the potential for permanent raising of the access road level under Briscoe's Bridge. This could potentially be achieved by installing a full-width speed bump with the top-level set at the flood level for a 1 in 2-year return period. This would prevent backflow of water in the floodplain south of the railway bridge towards Circuit Lane, and the temporary clay bund which has been installed has already been established to be effective in reducing backflows. The most appropriate method of ground-raising will need to be discussed and agreed with all stakeholders.	Works Completed November 2024	To monitor effectiveness during flood events
Further bank and footpath work to the Holy Brook and associated ditches will require consultation with and consent from the EA.	Bank raised & repairs completed Oct 2024	Unable to obtain EA consent to extend embankment raising works. To monitor and repair any damaged section when they occur
Further investigation of requirements for ditch and culvert clearance, in consultation with relevant landowners, and providing reminders to riparian owners of their repair and maintenance responsibilities.	Letter to go to residents Feb 2025	To share with affected residents in February 2025
Discussion of the removal of sheet piling from the culvert south of Circuit Lane with the landowner and suitable replacement material, to re-establish flow through the culvert to the designed levels.	Removal of sheet piling not required / culvert partially cleared Oct 2024	Investigations found that the culvert split into 2 No. smaller pipes which have been partly cleared. Further clearing arranged for April 2025.
Establishment of a checking/maintenance schedule for the ditch network connected to the Holy Brook.	Completed October 2025	Added to the annual ditch inspection programme
Installation of a level gauge in the Holy Brook to provide a visual indicator of water levels and potential flood risk to residents.	In progress	EA consent underway, works due in April 2025
Continue to explore the potential for 're-wetting' Kennet Meadows to deliver multi-functional benefits for biodiversity, flood risk management, public access and other benefits.	Project is in progress	Long term project, land ownership remains a challenge

3.11 Scours Lane:

Recommended Action	Date completed	Further Action
Limited information is available about the flooding of park homes at Scours Lane during the January 2024 flood event and any longer-term impacts. Further advice to be provided to residents about temporary flood protection measures for the site to be implemented when flood warnings are issued, if required.	On-going requirement for inspection during flood events	On-going long term to monitor. Residents are required to sign up to the EA flood alerts. Information will be shared with affected residents when we hold the residents open day event to coincide with the annual Waterfest event in June 2025

3.12 RBC Administrative Actions:

Recommended Action	Date completed	Further Action
Review and update the flood-related information and advice on the Council's website and make this easier for residents to find.	In progress	Under continual review
Review the Council's 'Sandbag Policy'.	Updated January 2025	Complete, awaiting approval.
To engage the University of Reading to jointly prepare a 'Communication Plan' to better inform the public of what the Council can offer during a flood event and to help inform and educate private property owners of their responsibility to protect their property if located within a flood plain and vulnerable to future flooding events.	In progress to engage EA to hold a residents open day to provide information and advice to vulnerable properties	Proposal to hold the residents open day event to coincide with the annual Waterfest event in June 2025. Going forward to review when required
Review the Flood Action Plan for Council owned properties	In progress review taking place Feb 2025	Reviewed every two years (it is currently being reviewed) or after a significant flood event,

3.13 Environment Agency – Administrative Actions:

Recommended Action	Date completed	Further Action
Review the text/email/phone call flood alert system in the Thames/Lower Caversham area to ensure that all roads adjacent to and north of Christchurch Ditch are included in	In progress to engage EA to hold a residents	Residents are required to sign up to the EA flood alerts. Information will be

any relevant River Thames flood alert messages for the areas both upstream and downstream of Caversham Lock.	open day to provide information and advice to vulnerable properties	shared with affected residents when we hold the residents open day event to coincide with the annual Waterfest event in June 2025
Provide an update on the alternate proposals announced following the withdraw of the Lower Caversham Flood Alleviation Scheme.	September 2024	No further action

3.14 Lessons Learned:

Council to be able to respond in a timely manner.	Review completed Oct 2024	On-going and to review following each Flood event
Recommended Action	Date completed	Further Action
Activate specific action plans for each of these vulnerable areas	Completed July 2024	The Council will continue to work with local communities and resident's associations, as appropriate, to develop local flood response plans, which will be under the control of local flood wardens (or other responsible individuals).
Affected residents to be made aware of the flood response action plans	In progress/ Letter to go to residents March 2025	To share with affected residents in February / March 2025 To work with local communities & residential associations, as appropriate, to develop flood response plans, which will be under the control of local flood wardens (or other responsible individuals)
Residents are provided with a clear route to contact the Council should assistance be required.	In progress/ Letter to go to residents Feb / March 2025	To share with affected residents in February / March 2025

That cyclical inspections and maintenance regimes are carried out on the watercourse ditches and recorded.	Completed July 2024	Added to the annual ditch inspections programme.
That the Council 'Flood Response Plan' is stored on a centrally accessible SharePoint site that all Emergency Response teams can access when required.	Completed March 2024	Completed no further action.
That the review and update of the response plan is completed, and new data and information added and or amended accordingly.	March / April 2025	The Council's single 'Flood Response Plan' is reviewed every two years (it is currently being reviewed) or after a significant flood event, as necessary.

3.15 Sandbag Policy

The Council has carried out a review of its sandbag policy which reiterates that the Council will provide sandbags to Council owned properties and that private property owners are responsible for resourcing / storing their own sandbags. The Council recognises that during extreme events there are a limited number of vulnerable properties that may flood and, in this respect, has amended the Policy to allow deployment to these sites. The decision to deploy sandbags is as stated in the Policy. Refer to Appendix 3.

4 Contribution to Strategic Aims

- 4.1 Full details of the Council's Corporate Plan and the projects which will deliver these priorities are published on the Council's website - [Corporate plan - Reading Borough Council](#). These priorities and the Corporate Plan demonstrate how the Council meets its legal obligation to be efficient, effective and economical.
- 4.2 The recommended actions carried out section 3.9 to 3.15 will contribute to the Council's Strategic Aims of providing a safe and healthy environment for all residents by reducing the flood risk as far as reasonably practicable while taking due regard to climate change and the location of vulnerable properties.

5 Environmental and Climate Implications

- 5.1 The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26th February 2019 (Minute 48 refers).
- 5.2 A Climate Impact Assessment has been completed which suggests a 'net medium positive' impact arising from proposed works to reduce the risk of flooding to protect properties within the flood plain.
- 5.3 Contractors were required to submit an Environmental Implications proposal which formed part of the quality element of the tender evaluation. A social value quality submission was also be included.
- 5.4 Contractors were required to submit Carbon reduction and improved sustainability targets. The intent is to reduce the amount of carbon used to produce the materials at source, using recycled materials, lower temperature materials, reducing the uncontrolled waste in the environment to reduce pollution of the natural environment, use of electric vehicles and plant, use of cold applied materials with lower carbon emission, as well as how they will achieve their carbon reduction targets.
- 5.5 The Council remains committed to a tree planting programme to increase canopy cover, improve biodiversity and reduce localised flooding. The Council is committing up to 1% of the value of the highway capital programmes towards this initiative.

- 5.6 The Reading Climate Emergency Strategy, which was endorsed by the Council in November 2020, highlights the importance of adapting to climate impacts as well as reducing the emissions which are driving climate change. The Council will regularly review design standards, in conjunction with industry bodies, to take into account the extreme weather events (both extreme heat and extreme cold) to ensure sustainability of the public highway network.

6 Community Engagement

- 6.1 The public can report flooding incidents to the Council via the Council's Web Page [Report a road or street problem - Reading Borough Council](#), the 'Love Clean Reading App', or by email Highways@reading.gov.uk. These include blocked road gullies, and drains, overgrown watercourses, flood defence assets, road and structures condition concerns, which are assessed, and repairs actioned. Proposed flood reduction schemes will be brought to Committee for consideration and approval should they meet the assessment criteria.
- 6.2 This report will be available on the Council's website following Housing Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee approval processes.
- 6.3 Communities and properties that are potentially vulnerable to fluvial (river) flooding can sign-up to receive Flood Alerts/Warnings from the Environment Agency which the Council's Emergency Planning Team will assist residents with.
- 6.4 The Council's Emergency Planning Officers are committed to working with local community groups to establish Local Flood Warden Schemes and Flood Plans.

7 Equality Implications

- 7.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act.
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 7.2 The Flood Reduction and Maintenance programmes consists of improvement work to the Council's existing public highway network and watercourses that the Council are responsible for and will be making improvements to existing highway assets. There is no overall change to service delivery at this time and all users will have a safe public highway environment. Should any future updates/amendments be required, which result in service delivery changes, an equality impact assessment will be carried out.

8 Other Relevant Considerations

- 8.1 There are none.

9 Legal Implications

- 9.1 The Borough Council, as Highway Authority, has a duty under the Highways Act 1980 to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, the safe passage along a highway.
- 9.2 The Council as Lead Local Flood Authority, has a duty under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 to reduce the risk of flooding.

10 Financial Implications

- 10.1 The Flood Reduction programme will be funded by the following:
- Existing Highway Maintenance Revenue budgets

- Successful funding from Thames Regional Flood & Coastal Committee (TRFCC) Local Levy

11 Timetable for Implementation

- 11.1 Maintenance works set out in the Options Report commenced at the end of bird nesting season in 2024 and in advance of the autumn and will be completed by Autumn 2025.
- 11.2 Capital works will complete in Autumn 2025.

12 Background Papers

- 12.1 There are none.

Appendices

1. January 2024 Section 19 Report
2. January 2024 Options Report
3. Updated Sandbag Policy
4. Flood Risk Roles & Responsibility