Appendix 2

Storm Babet October 2023- Section 19

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Why do we need a Section 19?

A: The Council has a duty under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 to investigate any incidents of flooding that have caused internal damage to properties. The Council is required to publish a full investigation report, identify who is responsible, and determine whether the relevant authorities have fulfilled their duties in response to the flooding.

Q: Why did flooding occur in Rotherham?

A: Localised heavy rainfall caused surface water flooding to individual properties, plus, more intense rainfall fell in the upper catchment of the River Rother in Chesterfield and north Derbyshire that saw river levels reach their highest level on record.

Q: Why has the Section 19 Investigation taken so long to publish.

A: Following the flood event, all properties that had been affected by flooding had a full investigation into what happened and how the flooding occurred. Flooding of various sources increased the time it has taken to collate all the information and provide suitable next steps which included working with all stakeholders. The Council also had to go through 2 periods of politically restricted activity during the local elections and then the General Election between March and July 2024.

Q: Why was there little to no warning that property flooding was going to occur?

A: The Environment Agency (EA) issue all flood warnings and have a duty to ensure all residents have a minimum of 2-hour response before flooding occurs. Within a rapid response catchment like Whiston this is reduced to 30 minutes.

At Catcliffe and Treeton Village a flood alert was issued at 09:34am on the 20th October. The flood warning was issued by the Environment Agency at 01:36am reaching residents by 02:14am just short of 2 hours on the 21st October.

"*Once levels started to rise again in the early hours of Saturday 21st October 2023 our Result Threshold trigger level was reached, this is the level at which we think property impact will definitely occur. This resulted in the warning being activated by the system at 01.36am, reaching customers via automation at 02:14am. Reports indicate the timing of first properties to be impacted by fluvial water as approximately 4am, resulting in 2.5 hours between the activation of the warning and impact, and just short of 2 hours for residents receiving the warning". (EA Source)*

Q: Did the Environment Agency Don Regulators store water on the River Rother?

A: The EA Don Regulators are in place to divert water from the River Rother into storage areas to ensure the peak on the River Rother does not collide with the peak on the River Don. Within Storm Babet, 2 of the 3 regulators operated and moved water from the Rother into the washlands. The Meadowgate regulator at Rother Valley Country Park was out of commission for refurbishment and did not operate and store flows within Rother Valley.

Q: Were Catcliffe and Treeton sacrificed to save other communities?

A: Catcliffe and Treeton was flooded due to the level in the River Rother reaching its highest on record. No operational decision was made to hold flows back and cause flooding to Catcliffe and Treeton Village.

Q: Will we flood again?

A: Flooding has increasingly become a recurring issue in recent years, highlighting a concerning trend in the frequency of extreme weather events globally. In Rotherham, there have been five significant flooding events in the past 23 years, each surpassing the magnitude of a "1 in 100 year" return period. The repeated occurrence of floods within such a short span strongly suggests that nationally we are becoming more vulnerable to extreme weather patterns.

Several factors contribute to this heightened flood risk across the UK, including climate change, urbanization, and inadequate drainage systems. As global temperatures rise, the atmosphere can hold more moisture, leading to heavier rainfall events. Additionally, urban development often reduces the land's natural ability to absorb water, exacerbating flood conditions. Given these changes, the probability of flooding occurring again in the near future is not only likely but should be expected. This reality underscores the urgent need for improved flood management strategies, infrastructure resilience, and climate adaptation measures to protect communities like Rotherham from future flood disasters.

Q: Is climate change the reason for increased flood risk?

A: Climate change results in more intense rainfall. This increases the chances of flooding. This is because warming means the air can hold more moisture (for every 1℃ of warming, the atmosphere can hold 7% more moisture). Climate change also makes the probability of extreme weather events more likely.

Q: What will be done to reduce the risk of flooding occurring again?

A: Following the Section 19 investigation the Council has looked at the next steps for reduce the risk of flooding for each area affected. The Council continues to carry out flood alleviation schemes within the borough. Further information on this can be found at - https://www.rotherham.gov.uk/water-management-flooding/the-6-priority-flood-alleviation-schemes

Q: What can I do if my insurance company refuses to provide me with home insurance?

A: A Government scheme was set up following the 2007 floods to help properties affected by flooding get affordable home insurance. The scheme is called Flood Re and further information can be found at - https://www.floodre.co.uk/

Q: What is property flood resilience?

A: Property Flood Resilience (PFR) is the term used to describe the ways in which a property can be protected from flood damage. The two main strategies used are ‘resistance’ and ‘resilience’.

Flood Resistance

A flood 'resistance' approach aims to prevent water entry or reduce the amount of floodwater that enters a property, and it requires the purchase and installation of home flood defence products. These products can be permanent or temporary. Permanent products are fitted, left in place, and remain 'always ready' to work 24/7, with no action needed to activate them in the event of a flood. Temporary measures are usually stored away and then put in place when flooding is expected.

Government guidelines suggest 600mm (2ft) as a safe height to resist water entry, but many buildings in flood risk areas are protected to around 900mm (3ft). Beyond this height, it is advised that floodwater should be allowed to overtop barriers and enter a property to prevent structural damage.

A successful resistance strategy ensures that every water entry point on the property is protected. If a single point is missed or a flood defence product fails, the property will begin to take on floodwater which compromises all other protection measures and results in a failed package of works.

Flood Resilience

A flood ‘resilience’ approach aims to reduce the damage caused by floodwater when it enters a property, resulting in quick and easy cleaning, drying, recovery and reoccupation of the property. This could potentially eliminate the need for an insurance claim. Resilient measures usually involve changes to the fabric of the building so no action is needed to activate them in the event of a flood. Undertaking a resilience approach directly after your home has flooded presents an opportunity to reinstate the property with water resilient materials and design which will speed recovery.

Q: Who is responsible for main river flooding

A: The Environment Agency are responsible for all main rivers. This includes managing and maintaining the river and investigating why flooding has occurred.

Q: Who is responsible for surface water (overland flow) flooding?

A: The Council acting as Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) is responsible for investigating and manage all surface water flood risk.

Q: Did the flood defences upstream in Derbyshire and Sheffield cause flooding in Rotherham?

A: All flood defence schemes before being implemented must show they will cause no additional flood risk to any area downstream. The Environment Agency have an assurance process to ensure flood water is not being pushed to another community.

Q: Did the Canal Barrier cause flooding in Catcliffe and Treeton Village?

A: The Canal barrier has been installed to reduce the risk of flows from the River Don entering the canal and flooding the train station. Flood storage at Forge Island is still fully utilised. The scheme has no negative impact on upstream areas and will not affect levels within the River Rother.

Q: Did the Waverley Estate increase the flood risk in Catcliffe and Treeton Village?

A: The new housing estate at Waverley has its own attenuation that has been created to store storm water, when high intensity rainfall events occur. Water is stored within a reservoir and slowly discharged in the River Rother at the same rate in which it would have naturally ran off the land before the development.

Q: When the Meadowgate Regulator was being refurbished what contingency plans were in place?

A: The Environment Agency have confirmed that the works were planned for the summer period and the construction phase was programmed to take one week. An issue occurred when installing the new gate that caused the delay and the need for a new gate to be installed at a later period.

Q: Would flooding have occurred in Catcliffe and Treeton if all regulators were operational?

A: The river level recorded on the River Rother was the highest on record and would have caused flooding if all regulators had operated. Hydraulic modelling carried out by the Environment Agency shows that within this size of storm event flooding would have still occurred.