

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

KENT FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Kent Flood Risk Management Committee held in the Online on Monday, 15 March 2021.

PRESENT: Mr A R Hills (Chairman), Mr A H T Bowles, Mr I S Chittenden, Mr K Pugh, Mr H Rayner, Mrs C Mackonochie (Tunbridge Wells (BC), Mrs G Brown (KALC), Mr D Brown (Kent Fire and Rescue), Mr G Brooker (Kent Fire and Rescue) and Mr C Mackonochie (KALC)

ALSO PRESENT:

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr M Tant (Flood and Water Manager), Mr T Harwood (Resilience and Emergency Planning Manager) and Mr A Tait (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. **Minutes of the meeting on 23 November 2020**
(Item 3)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 23 November 2020 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

2. **Kent Flood Action Group Forum**
(Item)

(1) The Chairman welcomed Mr David Goff to the meeting. He explained that the purpose was for him to give a brief introduction to the newly formed Kent Flood Action Group Forum. A more detailed presentation would be given to the Committee at its meeting in July.

(2) Mr Goff said that the Kent Flood Action Group Forum (KFAGF) had been set up in November 2020, based on a model created in West Sussex some 3 to 4 years earlier. The KFAGF met fortnightly and aimed to promote effective communication and collaboration between Kent's local flood groups in order to ensure that all ideas, information and experiences could be shared. It was supported in this aims by all the relevant agencies and organisations. The intention was to be proactive so that small, isolated action groups could be supported.

(3) Mr Goff said that the KFAGF's current membership consisted of action groups from Collier Street, Ightham, East Peckham, Hildenborough, Tunbridge Wells and Headcorn. Support was provided by the National Flood Forum. Issues discussed by the KFAGF included riparian ownership, planning and development and surface water drainage.

(4) Mr Goff then said that communities had a great deal of experience to share and that doing so would protect or alleviate the misery of flooding. It was vital that everyone worked together, and he looked forward to working closely with the Kent Flood Risk Management Committee.

(5) The Chairman thanked Mr Goff for his contribution. He said that the creation of the KFAGF addressed one of his greatest concerns which was how information could be widely disseminated.

(6) RESOLVED to thank Mr David Goff for his introduction to the KFAGF and to invite him to give a more detailed presentation to the next meeting of the Committee.

3. Dates of future meetings *(Item 4)*

The Committee noted the following future meeting dates:-

Monday, 5 July 2021;
Monday, 22 November 2021;
Monday, 14 March 2022.

4. Update from the Environment Agency - Presentation by Sally Harvey *(Item 5)*

(1) Ms Sally Harvey (Environment Agency Kent and South London Area Director) gave a presentation. The accompanying slides can be found within the electronic papers for this meeting on the KCC website.

(2) Ms Harvey began her presentation on a positive note by saying that 50,000 properties in the Kent and South London area were now better protected from flooding as a result of the six-year capital programme. In fact, this figure had only very recently been achieved. The target figure for the programme was now 54,584 homes which was some 5,000 more than had originally been planned in 2015/16.

(3) Ms Harvey then turned to the Grant in Aid (GiA) performance during the programme period. She said that £314m of capital GiA work was due to have been undertaken by the end of the programme and that efficiency savings of £44.7m had been achieved. A further £35m had been secured from other sources.

(4) Ms Harvey moved on to describe some of the schemes that had been a part of the programme. The first of these was the Medway Property Flood Resilience Programme. She said that 285 properties had been individually protected across several parishes including Yalding and Collier Street. There had been some significant challenges and Members of the Environment Agency's Regional Committee would shortly be considering a report providing assurance that the flood resilience of these properties was robust.

(5) The Broomhill Sands Coastal Defences Scheme was a £30m scheme to reduce the risk of flooding to 1,388 homes and over 100 local businesses. This had

included the delivery of 265k tonnes of rock and the removal of over 36.1k tonnes of clay.

(6) Ms Harvey said that the Hythe Ranges Scheme would be celebrating its official opening at the end of the month. The MoD had contributed 27% of the funding for the £25m investment which would protect 787 properties. The work had involved the refurbishment and raising of 43 timber groynes, construction of a 200m rock revetment and recharging the shingle beach with over 300,000m³ of material.

(7) The Sandwich Town Tidal Defence Scheme had won a Gold in the National Considerate Constructors Awards. The Scheme protected 488 homes and 94 businesses and was delivered in partnership with Pfizer and Kent County Council at a cost of £24.6m, £1.1m of which consisted of recovery works following the 2013 tidal surge.

(8) The Fairlight Coast Protection Scheme for Rother DC reduced the risk of coastal erosion to 150 properties. The works involved the construction of rock revetment at the toe of cliffs. £1.5m Capital Funding had been allocated to the Scheme and a further £154k contribution had been secured.

(9) The Scheme at Coronation Road in Folkestone Council reduced the coastal erosion risk to 10 properties and the National infrastructure. Works involved: major concrete repairs to Coronation Parade, impressed cathodic protection to steel reinforcement, and 60m of rock revetment to prevent outflanking. This had been funded to the tune of £3m with a further £1.9m contributed from other sources.

(10) Ms Harvey continued by describing the works at Salt Fleet Flats which highlighted some of the wider ways in which flood defence schemes were delivered. In this case, the EA had been able to deliver 67 acres of intertidal habitats. This had been the first managed realignment ever carried out in the county of Kent.

(11) Ms Harvey then showed a slide titled “Managing Flood Risk on Romney Marsh.” This consisted of a map demonstrating the breadth and complexity of the hard and soft defences that had either been completed or were ongoing to reduce flood risk to homes and businesses for the next 100 years in an area which was at or below high tide level. Any breaches of flood defences could have a very significant impact on over 1400 homes and businesses as well as important natural habitats.

(12) Ms Harvey turned to the programme for 2021/22. She explained that although the EA was moving from one 6-year programme to another on 31 March 2021, the intention was to ensure that the programme transition was seamless. Flood defence work had evolved over the past 6 years. Climate change was now recognised as a very significant factor, resulting in a growing emphasis on carbon reduction. Building resilience and adapting to climate change would play an increasing role in defending the country. A total of £5.2bn was available through GiA to protect homes across England. Flood defence work would offer wider benefits to the community by benefiting and enhancing the environment. It was vital that everyone worked in collaboration in order that the necessary outcomes could be delivered. The programme would seek to meet need sustainably.

(13) Ms Harvey went on to consider the financial breakdown of the next 6- year programme. It was intended to protect 16,000 homes in Kent through GiA funding of

£125m. There was, however, a funding gap of £15m despite external contributions of some £12m.

(14) The planned schemes were spread across Kent. The greatest of these was the Leigh expansion and Hildenborough Embankments Scheme. Other important projects were the Medway Estuary and Swale Flood and Coastal Risk Management Strategy, including the Sheerness frontage improvements, the South Sheppey frontage improvements and the Stour Pumping Station modernisation. These projects between them would cost £10m.

(15) Ms Harvey said that the 2021/22 programme would include work on the Leigh Expansion and Hildenborough Embankments. The Leigh storage area would be expanded by 24% (in capacity rather than in size). This would protect a total of 1,570 properties and businesses.

(16) Ms Harvey's final slide focussed on the Lydd Ranges Scheme. Urgent work had needed to be undertaken at Jury's Gap in 2020 to retain the green wall which had been in imminent danger of being breached. The total funding for the Lydd Scheme was £31.3m of which the MoD was contributing £13.2m. 1,761 properties would be at reduced risk of coastal flooding once the Scheme had been completed.

(17) Ms Harvey replied to questions from Mr Chittenden by saying that the defences she had described would prevent surface water and fluvial flooding, but not groundwater flooding when the land became saturated. Although she had used the phrase "help to reduce flooding", the risks were measured by specific categories in any particular year. A property would only be considered to have been improved when it fulfilled the criteria to be moved into a better category of flood risk. It was important to recognise that there would come a point where improving flood defences would become a decreasingly effective option. There was consequently a need to develop adaptation and resilience. At Lydd, for example, the flood defences were only being built to last for 25 years with a view to moving the defence line back to enable the environmental benefits of this protected area to flourish.

(18) The Chairman explained that the flood maps produced by the EA identified flood risk as though there were no protection measures in place. The defences at Lydd would last until 2055. At that point, the effects of climate change would be more identifiable, as would the best flood defence strategy.

(19) Ms Harvey replied to another question from Mr Chittenden by saying that the situation at Yalding was extremely complicated due to its location at the confluence of three rivers. A number of flood defence options had been modelled following the flood events of 2013/14. Currently, there was no technically possible project that would be socially acceptable or cost effective. Different measures were therefore being explored through the Medway Flood Partnership to ensure adaption and resilience.

(20) Mr Rayner asked whether the EA could give an estimated update for the Hildenborough Embankment scheme. He had recently attended the Parish Council's Annual Meeting and been informed that there were objections to aspects of the scheme that could lead to an indefinite postponement of the works.

(21) Ms Harvey replied that she would notify Mr Rayner of the finish date after the meeting. There was to be a public inquiry in April 2021 at the part of the proposal for the flood storage area. This meant that the timescales for the works would need to be reviewed (partly for technical reasons). There was, however, no intention to not go ahead.

(22) The Chairman suggested that the EA could consider publishing their design life projections for their schemes, including the likely date of review, so that this information could be disseminated through the Parish Councils.

(23) Ms Harvey replied to a question from Mrs Mackonochie by saying that properties built after a certain date (*later identified by Mrs Brown as after 2013*) would not be able to attract funding for adaptations. The intention was that all properties built after that date would be flood resilient.

(24) The Chairman said that some 400 new houses were being built in Romney Marsh in a Flood Zone 3 area. These would not be flood resilient. He said that DEFRA should take steps to ensure that all such new builds were flood resilient.

(25) Mrs Brown referred to paragraphs 149 to 158 of the NPPF which she said meant that all new properties had to be flood resilient.

(26) RESOLVED that Sally Harvey be thanked for her presentation and that its content be noted.

5. Environment Agency and Met Office Alerts and Warnings and KCC severe weather response activity
(Item 6)

(1) Mr Harwood introduced his report by saying that since publication of the agenda papers, the number of Met Office Weather Warnings had risen from 45 to 47 between November 2020 and March 2021. Consequently, the table in Appendix 2 should be amended so that there were 6 Warnings for Fog and 5 different events. Likewise, the number of Warnings for Wind had increased to 6 in 5 different events. This meant that the number of severe weather warnings was almost identical as for the same period in the previous year.

(2) Mr Harwood then said that the most significant events of the period had been the very dry November. There had been no alarms until the week of Christmas 2020 with the arrival of Storm Bella bringing high winds and heavy rain. This had coincided with the Covid19 testing requirements, the suspension of sailings of freight to Calais and Boulogne as well as the problems at Manston where the lorry drivers had been stranded over the festive period.

(3) Mr Harwood turned to the precautionary evacuation which had taken place at Little Venice on 27 December. The co-operation between the various agencies as well as the owner and manager of the Park had worked smoothly.

(4) The Medway Confluence Partner Group had met during the festive period, working very well together to deploy sandbags. They had also been particularly

successful in terms of clean-up and recovery interventions. This had involved the heavily silted drainage infrastructure.

(5) Mr Harwood said that there had been significant surface water flooding in January in sporadic locations across the entire county of Kent; from Edenbridge to Sheerness in the West to Alkham in the East. This had impacted on winterbournes such as the Nailbourne at Barham and the Drellingbourne in Alkham Valley.

(6) There had been highway flooding at Boughton Monchelsea where KCC Highways had worked very proactively in deploying pumps and tankers in order to clear the water before it could affect property. The community had also been proactive in alerting the agencies to the dangers at an early stage. The Boughton Monchelsea PC meeting, which Mr Harwood had attended following the event, had also provided important feedback.

(7) Mr Harwood continued by saying that Storm Darcey had brought persistent and occasionally heavy snow to the county on 7 and 8 February. No flooding had occurred, but there had been widespread disruption to the Medway Valley Line and to both the strategic and local highway networks including the A229 at Bluebell Hill and the A249 at Detling.

(8) Mr Harwood concluded his introduction by referring to his report to the previous meeting. Events had transpired as anticipated in that report. It was likely that the next few months would be a quieter period in terms in respect of severe weather impacts.

(9) Mrs Brown said that she and David Goff (Chair of Collier Street PC) had worked closely together during an unusual period which had seen the local villages affected by different floods instead of experiencing them at the same time as was normally the case. She then expressed the concern, which Mr Goff shared, over the number of alerts and warnings issued. This resulted in the local population reacting with insufficient urgency on those occasions when a significant event occurred. The EA issued flood alerts as a notification to farmers to move their livestock, but local people were treating them as false alarms. She and Mr Goff had arranged to discuss this with the EA to see what steps could be taken to overcome this problem. This could involve a reduction in the number of alerts or a publicity campaign to explain the purpose of the flood alerts.

(10) Mr Harwood said that he would also discuss this with the Environment Agency. There had been significantly fewer alerts in Yalding and Collier Street over the winter than in that of 2019/20. Flood alerts were often necessary even when no damage to properties was expected because of the potentially significant impact on the highways network. There had been quite a few road closures in the Yalding/ Collier Street area during the winter, and alerts had been important for the blue light services, particularly ambulances.

(11) Mrs Brown said that the problem with the alert system was that each one of them was received in every part of the river Beult. This contrasted with the Warnings which were far more locally focussed.

(12) Mr Harwood referred to paragraph 2.5 of the report which set out that there had been 91 Flood Alerts and 26 Warnings since November 2020 which represented

a considerable reduction from the 147 Flood Alerts and 44 Warnings for the same period in 2019/20.

(13) The Chairman said that he hoped that the discussions between the Parish Councils and the EA would result in the alerts being better targeted and more clearly expressed.

(14) RESOLVED that the warnings received since the last meeting of the Committee be noted.