

Chard Area Resilience Group: Start up meeting 2

1st March 2022 from 6.30 – 8.00

Notes of the Chard Area Resilience Group meeting held on Tuesday 1st March 2022 at 6.30pm in the Auditorium, Guildhall, Fore Street, Chard TA20 1PP

Present: 29

1. WELCOME

Cllr Baker welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. THE RIVERS AUTHORITY

Dawn James of the Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) introduced a video that gave examples of how different communities in Somerset had dealt with flooding issues in the past, the way they had set up resilience groups and the support they had been able to access.

A number of questions were asked and comments made. The main issues raised were as follow:

- With regard to Forton Brook concrete action was requested to help reduce the flow of the river and give residents affected a chance to take action. There was a feeling of helplessness as residents felt they were unable to do much more to help mitigate the flooding. A number of projects had been implemented in Somerset to help slow the flow and this was an item high on the statutory authorities agendas;
- There was a request to engage expert advice on what actions could be taken to help reduce the flow of local watercourses and install other mitigation methods. The SRA could potentially provide funding towards the cost of expert advice;
- Chard had its specific problems mainly with surface water and poor drainage management. It was suggested that action to help alleviate and mitigate the consequences of flooding would not be popular with landowners as mitigation projects;
- It was suggested that the Group needed to prepare as a Resilience Group in order to be able to meet the challenges of the next event and provide support to residents;
- Climate change and the effect of future proposed development in Chard was highlighted as most new developments were being proposed on greenfield sites which currently act as flood mitigation. The developments will make the issues currently faced even worse;
- It was agreed to find out when the Section 19 report would be published. It was understood that this would be by the end of March. The report would identify the causes of the two previous flood events but would not identify recommended mitigation;
- Tatworth & Forton had developed a Resilience Plan but required expert help to ensure that they were getting it right. There was potentially funding that could be used for this;

- It was highlighted that there were Sustainable Urban Drainage Schemes in Chard but that none of the existing developments had connected into them. It was suggested that connecting up to this drainage infrastructure could help to mitigate the impact of future events;
- Water courses had silted up creating some issues and all the sluice gates had now been removed.

3. **What is the Community Resilience Group - Jason Hawkes**

Jason Hawkes gave a presentation on what structure the Resilience Group might take and how it would address future events based on local intelligence.

The identification of local flood teams for each hotspot identified was a priority to ensure that the community could react immediately to future events.

The Group had two separate roles:

- The campaigning, lobbying and consultation side;
- On the ground support for local residents when an event occurred.

The main issues raised were as follow:

- The community needed to be able to respond to local events when they occurred;
- Major infrastructure would need to be funded by statutory authorities;
- There was a need to identify who to contact locally for help and support, including access to sandbags etc;
- It was suggested that Chard would benefit from alleviation strategies. In order to develop these there was a need to engage with various landowners to begin discussing what could be done.

4. **Farmer and landowner - Keith Robbins**

Keith Robbins gave a brief presentation from a landowner point of view. There was an issue with land management and lack of inspections from responsible authorities that had impacted the issue of flooding locally.

Concern was expressed that the planning system did not address drainage and flood alleviation issues, and the effect developments might have on existing issues and ways of addressing surface water drainage from new developments.

There was a need to improve the communication between the local areas and the responsible bodies.

There was some evidence that building materials were being carried down watercourses from new developments further exacerbating the silting issues.

5. **Manager of Civil Contingencies - Nicola Dawson**

Nicola Dawson gave an overview of emergency planning and community resilience in Somerset and the way emergencies were dealt with nationally and locally.

Issues raised included:

- The need to set up a local number for people to contact during emergency events;
- The statutory authorities had a contact for local resilience groups to contact them during emergencies. This number would only be available to an agreed contact within the resilience group;
- SCC would support the development of a local resilience plan;
- Blocked drains needed to be cleared. It was suggested that a meeting with Highways to address these issues should be organised by the Group;
- Some residents could not afford flood defence infrastructure. There might be some grant funding to help support residents affected by flooding to purchase flood defence items, but this would be subject to agreement and to a group of properties benefitting;
- Consideration be given to developing two maps, one identifying flood areas and the second identifying properties that might be affected by flooding and details of resident needs;
- There was a suggestion that Chard TC employees a full time employee to organise and co-ordinate resilience planning. Unfortunately this was not an option as the Town Council did not have any statutory powers and did not have the funding to support such a position.

It was agreed that future meetings needed to focus on specific items so that progress could be made on organising and implementing a local resilience response.

The meeting closed at 8:22pm