Chew Valley Flood Resilience Group - Presentation Report

"The Chew Valley Flood Resilience Group" are a group of volunteers who recognise that there are significant problems relating to flooding in the Chew Valley and the necessity for the villages to work together in a preventative, collaborative and reactive manner regarding flooding.

Main Issue: Keeping drivers and local residents away from flooded roads.

Sub Issue: Local schools currently only have a 15minute evacuation warning

As a group we highlight issues; clear drains/gullies etc as a preventative measure, and are also out on rainy/stormy days trying to help minimise the problems. We have been actively working with BANES engineers on preventative measures, identifying / prioritising flood risk on a priority map for both proactive and reactive assistance. We also try to actively encourage people not to drive through dangerous flood water. We contact emergency services to put up barricades if appropriate, but sometimes those services cannot reach those most at risk because there are broken down vehicles blocking roads in less serious flood areas. We cannot stop people driving through flood water but we do try to do what we can in at risk areas, put up signs or encourage people to take an alternative route especially at busy times. We are not allowed to engage with drivers who are determined to drive through a flood. If a car drives through a serious flood the electrical systems often fail, trapping people in their cars, and if the car floats/fills with water it is a terrifying and dangerous experience for the occupants and volunteers. Yet often entirely preventable.

Some new telemetry devices are being piloted in other areas in Chew Stoke and Chew Magna, as the current ones on the bridges, only give a 15minute evacuation warning of flooding to local schools/parents. In some areas "Action levels" are already sent by the bridge devices to flood wardens and a number of residents. Once the new devices are calibrated these will send messages to residents. The main issue is that the water that falls into the reservoirs (Chew Valley Lake / Litton) is not taken into account and that means that the schools have to make informed decisions to evacuate. This can be misjudged and means that parents can be called unnecessarily, or sadly sometimes too late causing danger to parents and their children. We are hopeful that once the new devices are calibrated that the schools will obtain a longer evacuation lead time.

The majority of casualties are parents with their children who are desperate to drop off /collect their children to/from schools.

We have plans to try to:

a) Improve the accuracy / warning times for the local schools
b) Set up safe walking / driving routes for parents in the event of flooding
c) Possibly set up a face book page so that residents can put on where there are issues with no accountability to members of the group. However, it is recognised that often no-one reports when a road is clear so a plan is required for this.
d) Increase awareness of the risks of driving through flood water (possibly nationally)
e) Understand the definitions of drains, gullies and culverts so that we can better communicate with BANES engineers as we often get these definitions wrong.
f) Understand the plan for clearing priority drains / gullies etc ahead of heavy rainfall/storms or following them so we know how best to protect / advise local residents.

We would especially like to thank Dan Parr (BANES) for all of his help in working with the group in identifying preventative / reactive measures. His help has been invaluable and has been very much appreciated and his input has meant that we have seen lots of improvements in many areas and more importantly less casualties.

In the last storm 4 vehicles needed recovering in West Harptree (near Parsonage Close).
On the 26th February, in heavy rain, there was one casualty in the same location. There are local photos that made the WhatsApp group etc of Fire Brigade support on that day. The farmer that towed the vehicle was from East Harptree which punctuates the need for valley wide collaboration on this issue. We are of course ever appreciative of the emergency services and the support of local farmers in these unfortunate events.


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