

Wolverley Village residents decide to do it themselves



Wolverley, just to the north of Kidderminster is a stereotypical English village and, as with many historic settlements, its position was originally defined by geography in terms of travel routes, river crossings etc. As well as the River Stour, Horsley Brook runs through the village, weaving past a number of cottages.

Back in the 'summer' of 2007, the village flooded twice, first on the 19th June and then, even worse, on 20th July. The little brook became a raging torrent and for the residents of the village, as for many others in the UK, the results were traumatic, destructive and expensive. The following months were spent clearing up, rebuilding and trying to get back to where they were before.

Just over a year later, on the 7th September 2008, it happened all over again. Whilst the flood waters didn't rise as high as the previous year, the memories were fresh in their minds and they decided that it was time that they worked together to try and stop this happening again.

In October 2008, a group of residents got together and invited everyone to a meeting in the local pub to discuss what they could do as a community. They contacted the National Flood Forum who came to the meeting and provided invaluable, free, advice on setting up their own flood action group.

A committee was formed by the simple action of including all residents who volunteered to be committee members and they got down to business.

The local paper and radio were contacted to let them know about the group and the news spread. The resultant coverage got the attention of the local elected officials and politicians and things started moving.

A meeting was set up for the following month and representatives from all the relevant organizations were invited to attend including Wyre Forest District Council, Worcestershire County Council, The Environment Agency, British Waterways and Severn Trent Water.

Derek Crawford, Chairman of the Wolverley Flood Action Group (FLAG), said of the resulting meeting, "Feelings in the village were running high but we felt strongly that the only way we were going to get results would be if we kept our heads and kept things under control. At the meeting, all questions were directed through the chair and we tried to avoid criticising any specific organization or individual. By the end of our first meeting, a series of actions were agreed and over the following weeks all the attending organizations had reported back on their actions."

Whilst waiting for the responses, the villagers decided to get on with a few things themselves. A group of volunteers got together to clear the brook of years of accumulated rubble and detritus and when they got down to it they found that the news had spread through word of mouth and more people came to help including people who hadn't been flooded or were even from outside the village.

Some remedial work was carried out on properties that bordered the brook to raise protective walls to a level slightly higher than the 2007 flood level. The villagers most at risk started an evaluation of commercially available flood protection products and ended up selecting Floodgate as a solution that all felt comfortable with.

Approaching Floodgate as a community group with a bulk order, they were able to negotiate a significant discount against what they would have paid if they had each purchased individually.

Over the last year, they have had occasion to deploy their Floodgates and have successfully protected themselves against any further flooding.

A year later, Derek Crawford reflected on what they had achieved. "It has been a lot of hard work but I don't think any of us would consider it a waste of time or effort. Through our own initiative we have regained confidence in our own environment. Anyone who hasn't experienced flooding will find it hard to appreciate how destructive it can be. It's not just the immediate after-effect of clearing up, it's the psychological effect of not knowing what you will wake up to or come back to when it rains. Getting back that sense of control is vital to everyone. Through the process we have also built a greater sense of community. Not everyone has been involved, some people haven't been able and some people haven't been willing but that hasn't really mattered. Some people who aren't even at risk have got involved and the end result is what counts. The icing on the cake is that, just recently, the local council have come back to us and retrospectively provided grant funding to cover a lot of what we have spent. Because we took our actions as a community group we retained all of our financial records and this made it possible for the grant to be applied."

So – what can you do?

Get together – create a voice that will be heard – it's the squeaky wheel that gets the oil.

Contact the National Flood Forum – they will provide you will all of the information that you will need to organize your own community flood group.

Work as a group, use the strengths and experience of each of the members, don't expect everyone to join in and let everyone who does join in have their voice.

Talk to your local authority, water company, the Environment Agency etc. but try to keep it objective. Remember that they are people too and if you deal with them as such you will get a much better response.

Keep records of meetings, actions and anything that you spend.

If you plan to purchase flood protection products then take the time to research what is available - look for products that carry the BSI kitemark and check out the companies that supply them, how long they have been trading etc. and ask for customer references.

Don't be afraid to negotiate prices. Buying as a group will give you more opportunity for savings. Check with your local/county council whether they have any grant schemes. DEFRA are distributing £5.5 million pounds at the moment through approved council schemes for property level flood protection.

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