

*Villagers work together to protect themselves and each other*



*Andy White, of South Tawton Parsh Council, fitting a flood gate.*

Last year, West Devon Council was successful in the second round of the DEFRA Property Level Flood Protection Grant scheme, winning funding to protect 15 properties in South Zeal, a small rural community on the northern edge of Dartmoor. They worked closely with the Parish Council, residents and the Environment Agency to design and deliver the flood protection measures required by the affected properties.

For all but one property, our Floodgates were chosen for their effectiveness and ease of use. Most properties are protected by individual gates but one garage is protected by a pair of gates with a stanchion to join them. In all of the cases, off-the-shelf sizes have been used.

The Floodgates were delivered in February 2011 when we also provided the residents with some basic training in how to use them. The following month, the South Zeal residents took part in Exercise Watermark, a nation-wide flood defence exercise, to test out the new village flood protection measures.

During the exercise, a team of residents deployed the floodgates and other flood protection devices to seal doorways and protect driveways to properties at risk of flooding from Ramsley stream, which can become blocked as it passes through a culvert under the road. Water pumps and generators were also on stand-by for the exercise.

Jackie Smith, Flood Risk Development Engineer for West Devon Borough Council, said: "We are really grateful for the support from the EA in the form of Individual Property Protection Grants. The evening's exercise showed that, with South Zeal's cooperative community spirit, they can now help themselves should they need to. It was particularly impressive that the exercise was completed with all protection measures in place in less than half an hour."

Parish Clerk for South Tawton, Peter Brotherton, said: "It was a really encouraging evening. We now know that, by working together, we can protect the vulnerable homes in the village in a fairly short time. We are indebted to Jackie Smith, West Devon Borough Council Development and Flood Risk Engineer, for getting us to this point." Headed by Andy White, Chairman of South Tawton Parish Council, volunteers in the community have organised themselves to react if flooding is likely, alerting other residents and helping to install the gates, barriers, pumps and generators where necessary.

Following a Flood Plan, part of the over-arching South Tawton and Sticklepath Emergency Plan authored by Tony Clark, the volunteers will act as the first responders, coordinating with other local volunteers and then with the emergency services when they get to the village. Flooding had been a common problem in South Zeal. "A sewer pipe which crosses the culvert can catch debris flowing down the stream, which could cause flooding." said Jackie Smith, "The local MP, Mel Stride, is asking South West Water to prioritise removing the sewer from the culvert."