

Starting up a Flood Action Group (Flood Action 4 Buckingham)

1. SUMMARY

The National Flood Forum, a national charity that began in 2002, supports and represents people and communities at risk of flooding. They have helped to set up, and support, around 160 community flood action groups. Flood action groups help to bring communities together, support people in preparing for future flooding and provide a point of contact for the variety of agencies that work on flood risk. This case study focuses on how one of these groups, Flood Action 4 Buckingham (FA4B) was established and how they support the local community.

2. ACTIVITIES

Buckingham suffered from flooding to 96 properties in 1998 and 2007. The Great Ouse continually poses a threat to Buckingham but proposed flood defences for the area had not received any funding. By 2010, Aylesbury Vale District Council received funding for a range of property-level flood protection measures. However, it was considered essential that volunteers were given help when a flood warning was issued in order to remind people about the correct use of property level protection products as well as bringing the community together to increase resilience. Consequently, The National Flood Forum and the Environment Agency approached an existing volunteer group, *Churches Together*. Flood Action 4 Buckingham was set up with some initial leaders and the group has subsequently raised funding and recruited more volunteers.

Working with the Environment Agency and others, they have made an emergency plan that is reviewed regularly in order to reflect any changes in circumstances. They hold yearly dry-runs of their plan and 'flood fairs' to raise awareness about flood risk, resilience and how to fit flood protection technology. Organisations feed information about flooding through FA4B who then share this with the wider community. People who have never been flooded before are part of this group and provide useful support for those people who do flood. This means better preparedness among those who might be affected and a sharing of support across the community..

During a flood event in 2012, the emergency flood plan was activated when an Environment Agency warning was issued. Within an hour, a response centre was set up at the local parish church and volunteers notified people of the chance of imminent flooding. The group had already helped residents to move their belongings and fit their flood protection over the previous few days. On the evening itself, some residents had to have their defences fitted despite saying earlier they did not need assistance. Only three houses were flooded. This was because of flash flooding that is thought to be hindered by newer housing developments. FA4B are keen to learn from this experience, particularly because it emphasises that the Great Ouse is not the only source of flooding.

Some of the longer term aims are:

- To use reductions in flood damage to persuade insurance companies to offer lower premiums to those signed up to flood groups.
- To continue to hold annual dry-run events of their community flood plan.
- To continue to raise funds when needed and recruit volunteers to each local area.
- To continue to develop river monitoring schemes.

Partners: Aylesbury Vale District Council, Churches Together, the Environment Agency, Bucks Fire and Rescue Service and the National Flood Forum

Length of time: 6 months from the initial contact to the first planned "dry run" event of the community flood plan.

Funding: Voluntary funding is raised through events, which also help to raise awareness. Additional donations have been received from local businesses. Aylesbury Vale District Council allowed volunteers to be covered by their insurance, which in itself is a major contribution as insurance costs for the group would otherwise be prohibitive given its volunteer make up.

3. OUTCOMES

- The local authority did not have to provide the manpower to knock on doors to raise awareness of flooding.
- The local authority was only called out once to supply sandbags.
- Those who have been flooded before keep a close watch on drains and gullies. This helps Aylesbury Vale District Council, which has limited human resources for such activities.
- Many residents said that FA4B's activities during the close run flood of 2012 helped to relieve the anxiety of going through the event.

4. BARRIERS

- Insurance and training of volunteers was an early problem. Aylesbury Vale District Council added the volunteers to their insurance cover and provided grants for purchasing protective clothing and equipment for the volunteers.
- Using photographs from the 2007 flood to raise awareness raised the possibility of litigation as some residents thought that it might impact on house prices.

5. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- ✓ Assign volunteers to specific homes needing assistance so they become known to the home needing help. People do not want strangers in their home when moving furniture and valuables.
- ✓ Split the group in to flood wardens for each road / area. This makes it easier for residents to trust wardens when messages come that flooding is possible and to believe that it is not another false alarm.
- ✓ Use the local press and parish publications to keep flooding on the agenda.
- ✓ Encourage groups and individuals to undertake 'dry runs' of any emergency plans that may be in place (whether at a personal level or a community level).
- ✓ Use available sources to prepare for flooding: the Environment Agency's river monitoring up and down stream was used as this showed river surges approaching Buckingham, and potential out flow congestion. The BBC interactive weather map, combined with local knowledge, helped to pin point the time of maximum flood risk.
- ✓ Share data. FA4B's photographs of river gauges and flood high water were given to the EA to help fine tune their flood warning system.
- ✓ Be prepared to wait a long period between floods. If you flooded once you will flood again. Buckingham was taken by surprise in 2007 having thought that the 1998 flood was a one off.
- ✓ Do not proceed without adequate insurance cover: volunteers will need to be insured and the requirements will include training in health and safety and proper risk assessments. Watch the video in the Links section.
- ✓ Avoid false alarms – if you keep having warnings and there is no flood, then people will become complacent.
- ✓ Do not just rely on Facebook, not everyone is on Facebook.
- ✓ Do not try to force residents to join, it must be an opt-in system

6. LINKS

- National Flood Forum: [How to set up a Flood Action Group \(10 Steps\)](#)
- [See a video](#) of Roger Parkinson talking about Flood Action 4 Buckingham at a conference about Smart Flood Protection where [Six Steps to Flood Resilience](#) guidance was launched in June 2013.
- Additional sources of information on the activities of FA4B¹, please visit their [Facebook page](#).

7. CONTACTS

- Roger Parkinson, Email floodaction4buckingham@yahoo.co.uk, cc rogerparkinson@yahoo.co.uk
- Phone 01280 812265