

Transcript of Verbal Submissions to WODC Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Meeting on 10/06/21 at 14:00

Re: Christmas Flood, Risk and Action

Kay Jerred, Riverside Gardens

Good afternoon everyone. My name is Kay Jerred. Thank you for allowing me to address the Committee today.

I live in Riverside Gardens and am representing nearly 50 elderly and vulnerable residents, many with mobility and health issues.

I know that there are other similar communities in Witney that need their voices heard. They too have suffered stress and anxiety as they watch heavy rainfall and the river level rise.

On Christmas Eve 2020 13 residents in Riverside were evacuated. 4 properties were flooded and others had water rushing into air-bricks. One resident is still in temporary accommodation. The average age in Riverside is 80+. It is one of the few affordable retirement complexes in Witney.

I shall now read some of their experiences from the night. Sadly, because of time constraints, I can't cover them all.

Ken & Suzanne:

As Chair of the Residents Association I have lived here for 13 years and have witnessed the results of the flooding and near misses that regularly occur here. Many are now terrified and every time there's a flood alert or storms are forecast they become extremely anxious that they will be flooded again. Until action is taken, this threat hangs over us.

Vera:

The sudden nature of the flood was a tremendous shock. It became even more real when I had to wade through water to evacuate my home overnight. I didn't sleep much. Many problems remain unresolved and action needs to be taken to stop this constant fear.

Antony & Maureen: Riverside House.

The flood was such a shock! We'd had an alert but with the words 'no expected property flooding'. Suddenly, water was over the terrace and we hurriedly put some plastic sheeting and an old gate outside our bedroom door. We couldn't find any sandbags and there was no response to phone calls.

Water came up the steps at the back and into our ground floor flat, only to be met by water coming in the front door of the main House. We then had a flood warning from the EA!

Overwhelmed and helpless best describes how we felt! What action is being taken? Who will bear the cost of protecting us adequately?

Margaret:

What a distressing situation watching elderly people trying to protect their properties and not being able to contact the Council for sandbags or help. If I hadn't been out walking and able to alert people, cars along the bank would have definitely been in the river. It was already dark and people had settled in for the night.

Kay pulled the emergency chord which brought the firemen here, but some of the relief firemen hadn't realised we were a vulnerable community.

When sandbags did arrive it was too late for some. The fact that we've been told to get our own flood defences, yet given little financial help, has added to the distress.

Liz:

I moved here in 2005 and have various health issues. In 2007 water enveloped properties within $\frac{3}{4}$ of an hour! With water already at the top of my thighs, I struggled to my neighbour who was very unwell.

This Christmas, alerted by a neighbour, I saw water pouring into my next door neighbour's flat; I was so worried for them.

Then came the frustration and anger: 'Here we go again', I thought, 'why has nothing been done in the 13 years between!'

I felt complete despair.

Can you imagine an evacuation at night in the cold and dark, wading through water with little or no help, with all Christmas plans in disarray and going to temporary accommodation in the middle of a lockdown?

Do you really understand the challenges and personal upset we went through then and the level of anxiety we experience every time it rains heavily?

It was good to see some of you visiting us, but we need to know what your plans are and what you will be doing please? All communities in the at risk areas, need to know this.

In Riverside we have heard nothing of plans since Christmas and no follow-up to the February Committee Meeting.

We have now joined up with flood action groups and 2 of us from Riverside are spending hours seeking funding and filling out application forms.

This is **one** reactive solution to us never wanting to see our friends and neighbours in such distress again. Rather interestingly, this one relies entirely on the elderly residents to undertake, rather than the authorities we rely upon to protect us.

There are, of course, about 20 proactive solutions to control floodwater in this area.

So many residents have said to me:

‘Kay, no-one **really** cares; we’re old.’

It would be wonderful to be proved wrong.

Thank you.