

## Submission from Kay Jerred

Good afternoon everyone. Thank you for allowing me to address you today. My name is Kay and I'm a resident and flood rep. of Riverside Gardens in Witney and a member of the WFMG. I last spoke to this Committee in June, 2021 on behalf of Riverside residents.

In relation to Riverside Gardens, we had asked for some financial support from the EA and Councils as we'd been told we needed to make ourselves more resilient, but no finances were available. One Councillor enabled snorkel vents to be fitted on at risk properties, for which we were very grateful. Some of you will know that we eventually had success with partial funding from SSEN Charitable Trust. We received £20,000 which enabled us to get front Flood Doors for eleven flats and Flood Patio Doors for four flats. Those residents were thrilled.

In June of this year, SSEN approached me again about putting in another application for funding. I'm thrilled to tell you that we've recently been awarded £40,000! It will enable us to almost complete the project of flood defences for the properties here. We're very aware however, that it will only mitigate the flooding and doesn't help other vulnerable Witney residents, homeowners & businesses still very much at risk.

I joined the WFMG as I knew we were still vulnerable until the regular maintenance of the river, was put back in place. This used to happen until the EA took over the reins. I'm very aware the EA has had a huge cut in its funding and I think this is an issue we all need to take up with our MP and Government representatives. Experience has also shown us what a huge issue the Witney Bridge is. WFMG has maintained regular contact with the EA and has tried to reach out to all Councils as well, but we can feel side-lined at times. We really want collaboration and to help wherever we can and hopefully, are not seen in anyway a threat. We're different personalities but we all have the same goals.

We're still waiting for information on an Emergency Plan and communication from multi-agency meetings on the Flood Report, the completion of which we do thank the WODC for helping to fund. As it will be two years in December since the last major flood, we are now asking for cohesive action please.

We need your support in pressing the EA & OCC to give immediate attention to the Bridge. It is a major pinch point of the river flow through Witney. Its capacity has been much reduced by structural work and large silt build up both upstream, downstream and under the Bridge itself. It needs qualified engineers to assess things.

Witney lacks floodplains and is urgently in need of better maintenance of the river Windrush; particularly from Langel Common through to Bathing Place. We need Councillors to help to fight for this or things will just drift on until the next inevitable major flood, causing more trauma and distress to all affected.

Lack of finances cannot keep being used as a reason, when budgets are available for environmental & bio-diversity projects. These things are interlinked. We've noticed a dramatic change on Riverside over the last two years. We haven't seen any dragonflies, or butterflies and these used to be seen in abundance. The ducklings of the last two years haven't survived. When I first moved in, you could see fish swimming in the river, but these have now disappeared. The lack of river checks and maintenance are having a huge impact on biodiversity.

We all support biodiversity but often not enough weight is given to the human cost of flooding. The stress and anxiety for affected people is huge and has to be addressed with some urgency now. We look to our Councils for support and help for people in these situations who cannot help themselves.

Here in Riverside, my neighbour, Margaret and I have worked tirelessly for nearly two years to try to protect this vulnerable community and we now ask that you commit to helping all affected residents, homeowners and businesses in your area by ensuring maintenance of what could be a beautiful river and an asset to Witney and its environs.

In conclusion, the core message from the WFMG is that all relevant groups, working in unison, could improve this situation considerably. Thank you for listening to me today and we look forward to a closer collaboration with you.