

SELLY PARK SOUTH FLOOD ACTION GROUP – ITS HISTORY AND WORK

Most residents will be well aware that on 6th September 2008 five of our roads experienced severe flooding – the worst in more than 80 years. Floodwater entered up to 90 homes and the occupants of many of these properties were forced to evacuate and live elsewhere for 6 months or more while repairs were carried out. Additionally many other houses were only a matter of centimetres away from suffering a similar fate. The roads affected were Cecil Road, lower Kitchener Road, Fashoda Road, lower Hobson Road and Dogpool Lane east of Manilla Road. It has been calculated that a total of 281 properties in this zone are at potential risk of flooding in an event similar to or worse than 6th September 2008.

The flooding was caused by a very high intensity rain storm, following a prolonged wet period, which caused the River Rea to overflow its western bank between Cartland Road and Dogpool Lane. The floodwater flowed over the flood plain, out onto Dogpool Lane and along the named roads, eventually exiting onto the Kitchener Road playing fields. Thus for a few hours the River Rea effectively created a second course to carry the floodwater. The situation was made worse by the restricted arch beneath Dogpool Lane Bridge being unable to cope with the flood water, resulting in a damming effect. Surface water from the rainfall also overloaded the drainage system, adding to the flood.

In the period following the flood the Forum Management Committee worked with officers from the Birmingham Resilience Team (BRT) which is the emergency planning department of the City Council, the City Drainage Engineers (and through them, Severn Trent Water), the Environment Agency (EA), West Midlands Police and West Midlands Fire Service. As a result, over many months a Flood Action Plan has been carefully developed and the Selly Park South Flood Action Group has been formed. The group consists of a Flood Action Coordinator, two Deputy Coordinators, five Flood Wardens and 25 Flood Volunteers. In the event of another severe flood threatening the area the Flood Group will mobilise in emergency action with the City Council, EA and emergency services to help residents (especially those who are elderly, infirm or disabled) to protect their homes and if necessary to evacuate to the designated Emergency Relief Centre which is Christ Church on the Pershore Road. Flood Group personnel will have ID photo badges and yellow high visibility jackets.

In September 2009 the Flood Group in conjunction with BRT and EA distributed a Flood Information Pack to the 281 vulnerable properties. Residents need to familiarise themselves with this information and keep the packs readily accessible but safe. In the event of moving from their property residents are asked to leave the packs for the new occupants to use. Additionally a questionnaire was distributed to which two thirds of residents replied. The information given is already helping the Flood Group in its planning and on the morning of Saturday 22nd May a full ground exercise of the Flood Action Plan will take place. Towards the end of 2009 the Flood

Group received a grant from the Birmingham Climate Change Partnership for the purchase of “FloodSentry” air brick covers and these have been stored by the Flood Group ready for distribution to residents in an emergency. A grant was also received from Birmingham City Council which has facilitated the purchase of high visibility jackets for the Flood Group personnel and a set of megaphones to warn residents in the event of impending flooding.

Further to all of this the Flood Group actively requested the EA to install an automatic river level monitoring gauge upstream on the Rea, close to Dogpool Lane. The EA responded, the gauge has been installed and went live in September 2009. This will provide the EA Duty Officers and in turn the Flood Coordinator with a much more accurate picture of how the river is behaving in future. The gauge is linked into the EA Flood Warnings Direct system to work in producing telephone warnings to residents in conjunction with the more distant gauge at Longbridge. The Flood Group also actively lobbied for Dogpool Lane Bridge to be replaced with a much more efficient structure to prevent the damming effect described earlier. The plans for the new bridge have been drawn up and published and it is anticipated that construction work on the £2 million project will begin by March 2011.

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