

Rye Bay Flood Emergency Planning Exercise
at Hontye Park, Bohemia Road, Hastings
on 16th March, 2007

Report by Cllr Granville Bantick

The exercise was designed to test the plans concerning flooding along the coast from Bexhill to Camber. The plans were constructed in co-operation with the emergency services and Rother District Council's Emergency Planning Department headed by Charles Sharrod. The attendance of representatives from other organisations helped to test the effectiveness of the plan and was a means of making any improvements which were deemed necessary. Alan Smith, Head of Emergency Planning at ESCC was also in attendance and drew attention to the high risk areas. Other contributors included Cllr Trevor Webb (Hastings BC) and Cllr Robin Patten (RDC) Cllr Patten drew attention to the need to communicate between the villages and for senior agencies to get on board to lower the risk of flooding. Bill Willcox (Emergency Planning Officer at ESCC) emphasised the need to test the systems, whilst John Counter (Environment Agency) drew attention to climate change and the need to adapt to rising sea levels which was calculated to increase by one metre in 100 years.

The assembled organisations were split up into working groups for the exercise. An imagined scenario was given and the groups were asked in written questionnaires to show how they would handle the emergency. The following was an example:

"Situation: *A severe flood warning has been issued for the Tidal Rother including Rye Harbour which were the highest risk areas. There is an extreme risk to life and property from significant wave overtopping and high water levels with possible breaching of defences.*" (Additional information was given about time of high water, predicted tide level, forecast surge height and wind direction).

"Advice:

- (i) Notify others in accordance with Local Flood Warning Plan.*
- (ii) Local Authorities consider activating emergency procedures as appropriate.*
- (iii) Consider need to mobilise resources - personnel. plant, sandbags, etc*
- (iv) Prepare for possible evacuation of the public in risk areas*
- (v) Flooding is expected in the specified area - be prepared should the situation worsen.*
- (vi) Keep a watch on the weather*
- (vii) Alert the Environment Agency to local flooding of rivers or the sea. Call their Kent Flood Warning Duty Officer on 01732 223018 or if no answer via their 24 hr Regional Control Centre on 0800 252676*
- (viii) Refer the public to Flooding on 0845 988 1188 for up to date flooding information."*

The Groups had 10 minutes to answer how they would deal with a particular scenario and were then presented with the advice which should have been expected of them. It was very apparent that organisations were unfamiliar with the drill or how best to react to the situation. Charles Sharrod posed several questions. How would organisations receive information? Was there sufficient transport for an evacuation if it were deemed necessary, and who would administer such evacuation? How well co-ordinated was the local Parish or Town Council with its emergency services? Did the town or village have a local control centre?

The following essential advice was given:-

- (i) A town or parish Emergency Group
- (ii) Residential Care Homes need to have a Flood Plan.
- (iii) It was the responsibility of RDC to cascade information down to Town and Parish level.
- (iv) Local knowledge was vital
- (v) Ensure Rest Centres can be used 24 hours a day.
- (vii) Sand bags and sand to fill them should be readily available
- (viii) Knowledge where additional clothing can be quickly obtained.
- (ix) Laminated maps for the police
- (x) Identification of the vulnerable - the elderly, frail, sick or disabled. As resources are limited identifying these people quickly must be a priority. In appropriate circumstances this should be co-ordinated through an Evacuation Control Post.

Recovery: Once the worst of the incident is over the focus will be to assisting the community in its recovery. A strategy for managing the process is contained in the County Emergency Plan. Experience has shown that responding to a flooding incident can be very resource intensive in both staff and equipment. Arrangements need to be made at an **early** stage by each partner agency - staffing requirements, sources of staff and shift arrangements as necessary taking into account normal key services.

Communication: It is essential to have good communication between all relevant agencies from the time of the initial warning. The co-ordinating role of Sussex police will be pivotal in ensuring that early and frequent liaison between the partner agencies is established. This will ensure that co-operation and control is effective and focused. Sussex police will maintain and circulate an inter-agency contact sheet. All partner agencies will be responsible for the provision of accurate contact information to the police and advising the police of any changes. All agencies are responsible for the setting up of their own communications networks and notifying partner agencies of the appropriate details.

Protection of Property: Responsibility lies generally with the householder/owner, but there are situations where local authorities may be able to assist. Priority will be given to those most vulnerable. Advice is given by the Environment Agency in free booklets on request. Unoccupied properties pose a particular problem and can be identified by the list of properties upon which a reduced council tax is levied.

Sandbags: Members of the public may obtain and fill a maximum of 12 sandbags free of charge from Rother District Council. It will give priority to strategic deployment of sandbags in a flood emergency. This will mean it will place available sandbags in locations which help protect the whole areas, rather than individual properties. It is best that individual residents make their own arrangements to protect their own property

After Flooding: Experience of flooding events shows that the impact is immediate and can be severe. A number of problems have to be dealt with and needs to be closely co-ordinated. East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service will assist in the event of any person being trapped. Pumping out flooded properties can often be ineffective until the water subsides - may need to be pumped out into watercourses or tankers but tankers may have to come from some distance Southern Gas will rectify external problems but individual householders would need to employ a Corgi registered plumber to examine and repair their appliances. Similarly, electricity supplies will be affected, especially where the flooding damages a generating sub-station. Again EDF will repair the external problems but householders will need to get an electrician to make internal wiring safe. Buildings may need to be inspected.

Conclusion: As will have been reported here there is a great deal that needs to be considered if Rye is to have a response unit set up in the event of a flood emergency. I will let the Clerk have appendices to this report which are in my possession and which will be available when required. Only the main issues are reported here. I would propose to this Committee that initially a small group is set up to see how best a response unit could be set up, and to evaluate the situation in the light of the resources we have available. **The watch words must be “Be Prepared”.**