

Briefing Note
Storm Bert – Summary of Impacts in Monmouthshire

Impacts Summary

- Property flooding (as of 16/12/2024):
 - Residential Properties (internal flooding): 68
 - Commercial Flooding (internal flooding): 25
- There is approximately £1m+ of damage to highways assets following Storm Bert.
- There are hundreds of trees damaged, many of them veteran trees that can't be replaced but may have been saved if we had more resources to monitor and maintain. If we are committed to mitigating both climate and nature emergencies we need funding for replanting schemes and ongoing maintenance.
- For all the damage that occurred on the highway network we will have seen similar levels on our public rights of way network, these routes take months to assess and unlikely to be completed as emergency works under EFAS either.
- A number of landslides have occurred across the county during this winter which will require long term solutions and funding.
- Appreciate Storm Ashley (October 2024) didn't impact Wales wide but it caused a major slip in Cwmyoy leaving residents stranded and costly repairs and substantial sandbagging and clean-up operations around the County.

Wider Context

- The frequency of significant flood events in Monmouthshire is undoubtedly increasing. Over recent years the establishment of MCC Emergency Response Teams and multi-agency coordination groups is an annual occurrence, often responding to multiple events each winter.
- Since October 2019 communities such as Skenfrith, Forge Road in Osbaston and Llanbadoc have seen at least 3 significant events which has devastated those areas.
- Storm Dennis in February 2020 resulted in flooding to c.200 residential properties and c.50 businesses in Monmouthshire.
- Storm Bert in November 2024 numbers currently stand at 68 and 25 commercial properties having flooded internally. We expect this number to continue to rise over the next few weeks.
- Following Storm Dennis in February 2020, Monmouthshire CC published Section 19 Flood reports recommending Natural Resources Wales undertake initial assessments into the viability of flood alleviation schemes at communities worst affected by main river flooding (Skenfrith, Monmouth, Llanbadoc etc). NRW have their own resourcing issues resulting in progressing the assessment of such schemes frustratingly slow for all concerned, all whilst repeated flood events occur.
- The mental toll on these communities is becoming unbearable, unless flood mitigation measures are considered and implemented at a faster rate, these communities risk becoming unsustainable and permanently blighted.
- Emergency Planning Specific Comments (Ian Hardman):
 - Conversations are two way – and I would like to highlight to WG that we carry out internal and joint agency debriefs after every event. We identify mitigations and alternative models of working as a result and further considerations on actions that we can adopt. The flood management teams report and recommendations regarding Old Dixton Road are an excellent example – highlighting some low cost mitigations that we as a local authority can implement. So we recognise this falls on us all to put appropriate measures in place – but the significant investment needed for the responsibility for the bullet points above does fall to NRW/WG. In addition – we have worked hard in putting

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formal site specific response arrangements in place for our Flood Hot spots – and continue to mitigate impacts as far as possible in this way – but more permanent flood mitigation solutions are now needed. Response costs will continue to drain **all** partner finances – formal flood mitigation is a saving in the longer term.

- Final point I would like to emphasize in relation to my last comment – there seems to be more and more reliance on emergency response. These events are becoming more intense, protracted and frequent. The UK government (and WG now) look at risks – with the publication of a national risk register – with adverse weather and flooding being one of the highest on these risk registers. Stop relying on response structures and good will of some excellent local authority staff (*Monmouthshire CC services and staff at least as I definitely think not all local authorities come anywhere near us in terms of response and commitment*). Response is just one element which we are now very well rehearsed at. Its time to **invest** in resources and formal additional flood mitigation. In terms of risks – my biggest fear continues to be concurrent emergencies – just how would we manage a major incident alongside a major flood/adverse weather event.
- Highways Operations Specific Comments (Carl Touhig):
 - The EFAS funding thresholds should be reviewed, its easy to spend £420K revenue when your base budget is £6m, its not so easy when your base budget is £600k. As an authority we don't have the physical resources, staff and machinery to commit that level of emergency revenue expenditure and overtime, especially with the risk that it may not be recoverable. This means things are kicked down the road, in a few weeks time no-one will remember how pleased they were to see us sandbagging or removing trees, they will be complaining about that pothole we haven't got to yet and the leaves on the path. We have 30 staff in highways and 20 were deployed on response and recovery so there is very little scheduled work going on during and following these events.
 - We have the prolonged joy of a double, sometimes triple bubble with the Usk and Monnow catchments reacting during the event and the Wye coming a few days later. This can result in the same areas in Monmouth needing a second recovery effort and some very long days and nights for the staff involved.

Investment needs

- Additional revenue funding to assess and deliver flood alleviation schemes through current WG grant funding streams. This needs to cover large capital main river schemes (NRW) and smaller schemes covering local sources or flooding (surface water, ordinary watercourse and groundwater) for which MCC are the Risk Management Authority.
- Additional revenue funding for Flood Risk Management teams within Council's to deliver statutory duties. The enactment of Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act in Wales in January 2019 has diverted staff resource to deliver the SuDS Approving Body role, leaving little resource for Councils to deliver flood alleviation schemes in a timely manner.
- The NRW feasibility study into investing in a flood mitigation scheme at Skenfrith was postponed again last financial year (for the second time?) – I am sure the cost / benefit analysis may not support such a scheme after that study – but that really does need implementation and evidence now – and the residents need to be reassured this is going ahead.
- Additional River Gauge on the R Monnow to assist in formal warning for Forge Road - again there may be alternatives that we can look at – but being part of the national river warning system would support residents and our emergency response arrangements.

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- Old Dixton Road / Monmouth Leisure Centre and the NRW Flood Gates – this needs a permanent pumping station.
- More funding for investment in equipment and staff resources. Gulley suckers and sweepers and enough staff to be able to implement a comprehensive winter maintenance programme in keeping drains free from leaf and other debris.
- Central funding for high-capacity pumps to protect critical highway infrastructure would support the emergency operational response and access/egress to flooded communities.
- Longer term, sea level rise will impact communities such as Tintern (tidal flooding) and coastal communities in the south of the county. Investment to ensure these communities are sustainable is required.
- Natural Flood Management (NFM) – More investment in larger NFM schemes is required. Consideration should be given to the establishment of a multi-agency task force/working groups to consider such schemes on river catchment scales.
- Many WG flood grants, particularly the Small Scale Works Grant, are annual grants, multi-year grants would improve efficiency, programming and delivery of schemes and flood risk management work activities.