



# How can we prepare for the next floods?

As we are now starting to experience regular adverse weather events due to climate change, it has become even more important to support our communities to become proactive, prepared and resilient, says Helen Richards of GRCC

**G**loucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC) has been working with, and supporting, Gloucestershire's communities for almost 100 years to manage change and

work towards sustainability. Since the floods of 2007, we have worked more directly with them to help facilitate and empower a proactive response to emergency situations as they arise. Flooding in the Tewkesbury area is well

known, and we all remember the iconic images of Tewkesbury Abbey cut off from the rest of the town by the convergence of our two rivers, the Avon and Severn, which were shared around the globe in 2007. However, all



Photo: Getty Images/Stockphoto/David Carnings-Bushell

parts of our county are impacted in different ways by flooding. For example, in the Cotswolds there are communities who face flooding from rainfall, rivers and high groundwater. With the expectation that high-intensity rainfall events will continue to occur more frequently due to climate change, everyone is working hard to be more prepared and resilient, with natural flood management now an accepted part of the arsenal for managing flood risk.

In 2009, GRCC developed the *Community Emergency Planning Toolkit* which has been made available to every parish and town council in Gloucestershire in its various iterations. As we move towards our centenary year, we have refreshed this toolkit and will be relaunching it this year. In 2014 GRCC was commissioned by Tewkesbury Borough Council to work in partnership with them to run a Community Flood Resilience Project. Since then we have continued to build relationships with key agencies and strategic partnerships to become the voice for and link to communities. GRCC has been an active member of the Local Resilience Forum's Community Resilience Group for many years. Partnership working is the key to success when supporting communities to understand their flood risk and prepare accordingly.

***'Flooding has become more frequent in the Cotswolds over recent decades and that trend seems likely to continue'***

Gloucestershire Local Resilience Forum manager Matthew Steele says: 'The fantastic response by many communities to COVID-19 has shown the value of communities being resilient and prepared for any future emergencies.'

Local responders have tried and tested plans and arrangements in place to work in partnership and to respond to emergencies, but recognise the important role communities with local knowledge and eyes and ears on the ground can play in the overall response.' The Community Flood Resilience



Photo: grcc.org.uk

Project in Tewkesbury Borough is well established, but we are always welcoming new flood wardens to the team. There are volunteer wardens signed up from 23 parishes across the borough, from the Severn parishes in the west across to the top of the catchment in the east where surface water flooding is the main cause for concern.

When asked about his role, Doug Miles, a Tewkesbury Borough flood warden in Hasfield since 2016, says: 'Hasfield sits next to the River Severn, and every couple of years the floods cut off some of our roads, and in extreme cases, flood three of our dwellings. I'm very conscious of the potential damage to cars driving into unexpected floods, and the occasional need for people who venture too far to be rescued. I try to ensure that flood signs go up ahead of the danger – and are taken down once it is over. I also keep an eye on the folks living close to the waters in case they need help, and would coordinate with the team at Tewkesbury Borough Council if they did.'

Nigel Adcock, flood warden since 2019 for Woodmancote, which receives run off from Cleeve Common, says: 'Being a geography graduate who likes helping people, I find this voluntary role a very rewarding one. I live in Woodmancote, just underneath Cleeve Hill. This is an area that can be affected by pluvial flooding during times of heavy rainfall. The surface water has in recent years been squeezed by development. My role has largely involved tracking the spread of any flood water and helping residents keep

themselves and their possessions safe.' Through established relationships and GRCC's proven track record, we were proud to announce in 2021 that Cotswold District Council had commissioned GRCC to set up and run a Community Flood Resilience Project across the district. I am now busy recruiting a team of volunteer flood wardens from parishes and towns across the district, and have been out walking and meeting people in Bledington, Cirencester, Bourton-on-the-Water and Upper Slaughter, to name a few.

Cotswold District Council councillor, Andrew Doherty, cabinet member for the environment, waste and recycling, says: 'Flooding has become more frequent in the Cotswolds over recent decades and that trend seems likely to continue with the changing climate. In launching the flood warden scheme, working together across communities and with the help and support of Helen and her team at GRCC, we hope we can help local residents better prepare. The flood wardens will be our first line of defence, letting the relevant authorities know about flood risks, flood events and also sharing information with their own communities.'

Barbara Piranty, GRCC's chief executive, adds: 'Gloucestershire has learned many lessons from the floods of 2007, in particular the importance of proactive planning and local support and working in partnership. That is why the development and refresh of the *Emergency Planning* ▶



Photo: grcc.org.uk

**ABOVE:**  
The River Avon in flood

**TOP CENTRE:**  
Helen Richards of GRCC

**BELOW RIGHT:**  
Nigel Adcock has been a flood warden for Woodmancote since 2019

Photo: grcc.org.uk



Volunteer flood wardens on walkabout at Bledington

## *'By becoming a flood warden, you can play a key role'*

*Toolkit* is so important, in order to provide a framework for communities to plan and respond to these increasingly regular adverse events, but also to put in place the teams of volunteer flood wardens to help and prepare local people in communities that are at risk of flooding.'

By becoming a flood warden, you can play a key role, working with your local town or parish council, to help your community prepare for, respond to and recover from flooding.

GRCC is also available to support communities to improve their wider resilience and response to emergency situations, not only flooding.

As I finish writing this article, we are coming out the other side

of Storms Dudley and Eunice and feeling some effects from Storm Franklin. What feels like an unprecedented week of storms affecting the county where we experienced not only a Red Weather Warning from the Met Office, but also several Severe Flood Warnings issued by the Environment Agency.

Luckily, the expected impact of gale force winds up the estuary from Storm Eunice coinciding with high tides was not as severe as they had thought. However, there were still many left without power and water in the county. The strong working relationship we have with key agencies was evident in the days before and during Storm Eunice, with regular updates from

Photo: grcc.org.uk



Photo: grcc.org.uk



Doug Miles, a Tewkesbury Borough flood warden in Hasfield

## CALL TO ACTION

Making sure your community is prepared for emergency situations, such as severe weather, can help you deal with crisis situations and lessen their long-term impact. A Community Emergency Plan (CEP) is a document setting out what you'll do in an emergency before statutory authorities and Emergency Services

arrive on the scene, to support them in tackling the emergency, and to deal with the aftermath.

If you live in the Cotswold District or Tewkesbury Borough and would like to find out more about flood wardens or community resilience, please contact Helen Richards at [helenr@grcc.org.uk](mailto:helenr@grcc.org.uk)



## THE TRUTH ABOUT SANDBAGS

The topic of sandbags is one that can generate polarised views. Sandbags are probably the first image that comes to mind when you think about flood protection. They feel like a practical and accessible way to try to protect your home from flood water by diverting it away or around, rather than through.

However, it is also true that sandbags are not particularly environmentally friendly, they do let some water through and you have to be careful disposing of them after a flood as they can become contaminated. An important point is that there is a misconception that local councils have a responsibility to provide sandbags to homes or businesses. This is not the case and individuals are responsible for protecting their homes or businesses.

It isn't all doom and gloom. There are modern alternatives on the market which report to be more sustainable and cost effective. If you live in a flood risk area there are also a range of property level protection methods to consider.

Flood resistance measures include removable barriers for doors and windows, temporary covers for air bricks, valves to prevent sewage backing up in to your property and water pumps. Flood resilience measures include raising sockets, using tiles rather than carpet and other measures to limit the damage and reduce recovery time (and costs) should flood water get in.

Environment Agency colleagues on the status of the flood warnings. Tewkesbury's flood wardens were working hard to 'warn and inform' far and wide in their communities, while putting their own safety first.

As we recover from the storms and await the full impact on river levels along the Severn, the flood wardens remain vigilant

and active. Working with these amazing volunteers over the last four years has been an honour. The local knowledge and experience they have is invaluable and their enthusiasm and passion infectious.

If the team we have in Tewkesbury is an indication, the Cotswolds will be in good hands as we work together to build their team of volunteer flood wardens.

My aim remains for there to be a network covering the whole county supporting their communities to be resilient and empowered, and respond proactively to future emergency situations. ♦

**National Flood Forum:**  
[nationalfloodforum.org.uk/about-flooding/reducing-your-risk/protecting-your-property](http://nationalfloodforum.org.uk/about-flooding/reducing-your-risk/protecting-your-property)  
**The Flood Hub:**  
[thefloodhub.co.uk/pfr](http://thefloodhub.co.uk/pfr)

Getty Images/Stockphoto/MacLine Headz



**ABOVE:**  
Rising waters at Middle Duntisbourne's ford

**RIGHT:**  
Sandbags are probably the first image that comes to mind when you think about flood protection