

Building community resilience to flooding in Hambledon, Hampshire



Flood water trail through the village of Hambledon in 2013

1. SUMMARY

In late January 2013, an excessive amount of rainfall fell on the village of Hambledon in Hampshire. Over half the amount of expected annual rainfall fell on the area in just seven weeks. However, thanks to prior efforts by agencies in the area to build community resilience, the damage from flooding was much less than might otherwise have been expected. Only £3,600 was spent by Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service on the emergency response to the flood in 2013. Some twenty years earlier, a similar incident cost the service £309,000. The work of the local community, in association with the Local Resilience Forum and the Fire and Rescue Service, was central to achieving the cost saving and establishing a community-led approach to flood management.

2. ACTIVITIES

Hampshire and the Isle of Wight Local Resilience Forum (HIOWLRF) began to engage with Hambledon residents in 2011 to understand how it could support community-led preparedness for, and responses to, flooding. The village had been affected by flooding on several occasions prior to 2011 and most residents were aware of the potential damage a flood could cause. To complement the response of the Emergency Services to flooding, the HIOWLRF aimed to enable the community to prepare for, and respond to flooding independently, building on local expertise and a willingness to 'stand on its own two feet'.

The community-led approach required the HIOWLRF and local residents, steered by the Hambledon Flood Action Group, to establish expectations of both parties' roles in preparing for and responding to flooding.

At the beginning of the process, the Flood Action Group and HIOWLRF identified flood risk areas by mapping the flow of water at local level in the event of a flood. A key learning point, informed by local expertise and experiences of previous floods, was to not suppress the flow of water through the village during a flood. Instead, an approach was established to manage and control the flow of water through the village. Residents also highlighted areas which needed to be accessed during a flood, such as entry points to schools and shops. In practice this resulted in the demarcation of a flood water trail through the village, flanked by sandbags to contain water (pictured above).

Furthermore, Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service began to engage with local schools to raise awareness amongst pupils and their parents of the dangers of flooding. A book entitled *Susie the Childminder*, funded by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and published by the Fire Service ([see the online version](#)), was distributed to schools and acted as a starting point for discussion around flooding and climate change.



3. OUTCOMES

There were risks associated with the approach, although it proved effective in lessening the impact of a flood in January 2014, when 55 percent of annual rainfall fell on the area in seven weeks. A comparison between the responses to the 2013 flood and one in 1994 illustrates the effectiveness of the community-led, HIOWLRF-supported flood response. In 1994, Hampshire Fire Service spent £309,000 on responding to a flood where the main expenses were attributable to a 6–10 week-long period of fire appliance usage, pump usage, staff, overtime, recalling retained firefighters and welfare. In 2013 however, the cost to the Service attributed to responding to flooding had fallen markedly to £3,600, as the Hambledon residents had developed the ability to respond to flooding without reliance on the Service.

4. PARTNERS

The key partners involved in the establishment of the community-led response to flooding in Hambledon were the Flood Action Group, residents of Hambledon, the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Local Resilience Forum and Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service.

5. COSTS

Although agencies had invested in community engagement, paid for though staff time 'in-kind', the approach resulted in a significant cost saving and has reduced the impact on operational resources during emergencies.

6. CHALLENGES

Community members are often aware of the risks to and resources within their community and are therefore well placed to assist in complementing the emergency services' response to flooding. However, a lack of resources, limited awareness of risk and exclusion from participating in decision making can be barriers to doing so.

In the case of Hambledon, awareness of flooding and a willingness to adapt to risk were important factors that enabled the community to prepare for and respond to flooding. To mitigate risks during the 2013 floods, Hampshire Fire Service provided support and guidance and was therefore able to maintain resources to be able to respond to emergency situations elsewhere within the county of Hampshire.

7. CONTACTS

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