

REPORT TO EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 24 June 2014

Report of: Assistant Director Public Realm

Title: Flooding in Topsham - Response and Recovery

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Executive Function

1 What is the report about?

- 1.1 The assessment, funding and repair of flood damage at Topsham following the severe storms earlier this year.

2 Recommendations:

- 2.1 That the Council recognises and commends the response of the residents, community associations, voluntary and private sector organisations, statutory partners and council staff for their contribution to emergency flood response and flood recovery works at Topsham this year;
- 2.2 That the Council engages with the Environment Agency and other agencies to promote a revised flood risk study to ensure that the community is adequately protected, identify future funding and clarify future responsibility for estuarine defences;
- 2.3 That a contribution of £5,000 be made to Devon County Council for the repair of the Goat Walk, Topsham, provided that there is sufficient money included in the allocation made available to the City Council from the Environment Agency for Flood Risk Management grant funding.

3 Reasons for the recommendations:

- 3.1 To complete the flood recovery works in Topsham and determine future works required.

4 What are the resource implications including non financial resources.

- 4.1 All known and anticipated costs of recovery have been covered by the Environment Agency's grant funding. A significant amount of officer time has been committed to this project and this will continue for some time into the future. There may be costs associated with a new flood risk study but if that is the case it will be the subject of a future report.

5 Section 151 Officer comments:

- 5.1 The responses to the flooding at Topsham have been funded from a variety of sources including the Bellwin Scheme and the Environment Agency. The impact on the City Council has been approximately £26,000 which is not eligible for Bellwin funding under the rules set out in the Scheme.

6 What are the legal aspects?

- 6.1 The future responsibility and maintenance liability for the flood defences protecting Bowling Green Marsh and Bowling Green Marsh Road needs to be considered.
- 6.2 The current repair work will reinstate the level of protection previously enjoyed by the area. However this raised linear embankment has historically always been maintained by the Environment Agency as a coastal defence and discussions with the Environment Agency about the future upkeep of this structure needs to be clarified.

7 Monitoring Officer's comments:

- 7.1 Clearly the Council is advised to maintain its assets. However, whilst emergency works were carried out to Marsh Bowling Green on a one off basis, careful consideration should be given as to whether it wishes to continue to maintain the bank. For example, the Council may wish to consider whether it wished to allow Bowling Marsh Green to return to its natural state which may be a salt water marsh.

8 TOPSHAM FLOOD RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

- 8.1 Early in February this year the combination of high spring tides, strong southerly winds and low pressure caused a tidal surge and resulted in both river frontages in Topsham being overwhelmed and inundated. Flooding also occurred on the Quay in Exeter. In total, 36 residential, business and community premises properties were flooded and a further 40 were protected through Exeter City Council's deployment of temporary sandbag defences.
- 8.2 The emergency response to the flooding at Topsham this year was commendable, with the whole community engaged in delivering flood protection and support for properties and people threatened with flooding. Residents, community associations, voluntary and private sector organisations, statutory partners and council staff worked together to mitigate the impact of the flooding emergency and work has continued on flood recovery works. The Council provided an emergency response at Topsham and on the Quay at Exeter over a period of more than a week with staff working split shifts to cover the diurnal flood risk from the high tides, supported by contractors. Around 1500 sand bags were supplied and distributed to protect up to 100 waterside properties in Topsham from Ferry Road to The Strand.
- 8.3 The quayside areas in Topsham suffered three significant flood incidents within one week which gave real cause for concern given that the level of inundation was the worst experienced in over fifty years. The Quay walls to the Lighter and Hannafords' Quay have suffered some low to moderate levels of damage that needs to be assessed for repair. Similarly, there are stone causeways which also require repair owing to damage caused by the severity of the storms. A full survey of the council-owned quays and associated waterways structures at Topsham is necessary to determine the extent and cost of the damage caused to the waterside structures.
- 8.4 In numerous locations along the Quay areas, and along the Goat Walk a number of wooden benches were lost or severely damaged by the severe wave action generated by the poor weather conditions. Similarly other street furniture such as litter bins were also lost or damaged beyond repair.
- 8.5 No households or businesses were required to evacuate but residents of five

properties at Riversmeet were unable to access/leave their homes as a result of damage to coastal defences at Bowling Green Marsh during spring tides. The structure protects Bowling Green Marsh Road from tidal flooding which would occur regularly at high spring tides, effectively making the road a tidal causeway. This road is the only vehicular access to the five properties at Riversmeet.

- 8.6 In March this year, this Committee approved the emergency works and expenditure of up to £50,000 to undertake repairs to the 35 metre breach at Bowling Green Marshes after the Environment Agency advised that they considered it uneconomic to repair. This early intervention aimed to ensure residents, businesses and their properties were not left vulnerable to either fluvial or tidal flooding. Future responsibility for estuarine defences remains uncertain, with discussions ongoing. The remedial work commenced on site as soon as the necessary consents were granted from English Nature, the RSPB, and the Environment Agency.
- 8.7 The Goat Walk was extensively damaged and temporarily closed to pedestrians. The ownership of this structure is unknown and but, in view of its status as a public right of way, Devon County Council undertook to do the repairs, much of which were completed by Easter at an estimated cost of £25k. The County Council has requested a contribution towards this cost from the City Council in recognition of its status as a route in the City Council's strategic plan for tourism. There is no funding available in the Council's revenue budgets for this but it has been included in the bids for external funding support, see 9.2 below.
- 8.8 The Council's Engineering team and Emergency Officer continue to be engaged in helping and liaising with community leaders and organisations in Topsham, providing advice, guidance and support on flood response and recovery to the community as a whole and to individual householders as necessary.

9 COST OF TOPSHAM FLOOD RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

- 9.1 The total cost to the City Council of the response to and recovery from flooding incidents in February 2014 is estimated at £150,000.

Emergency structural response	£25,000
Damage to Quays (still awaiting survey)	£40,000 est.
Street Furniture and litter bins	£3,000
Fallen trees	£19,000
Sandbags	£13,500
Bowling Green Marsh	£50,000
Total	£150,500

- 9.2 Funding of up to £130,000 has been made available from the Environment Agency's Flood Risk Management grant scheme. £32,000 has been claimed from the Government's emergency Bellwin Scheme and, as a result of the thresholds placed on second tier authorities, we are likely to receive around £5,500 of this. Further bids for community recovery and resilience support have been made to the Devon Community Foundation, the DCLG Severe Weather Recovery Scheme and the Devon Community Fund.
- 9.3 We also hope to enable businesses and householders to access funding for individual flood defence schemes. A further, separate grant scheme directed at homeowners was announced in February with £5,000 available for affected homeowners and businesses to support repairs which improve a property's ability to withstand future

flooding. The grant system is administered by the City Council but only requires a minimum input to ensure eligibility and compliance of individual property owners. Businesses affected by the flooding are also able to claim up to three months' relief from business rates. At the time of writing, no claims have been made by eligible businesses in Exeter.

10 FLOOD RISK AT TOPSHAM

- 10.1 The flood risk at Topsham is very dependent upon a particular set of weather conditions occurring which combine with the state of the tide, wind direction and low pressure to create serious flooding problems.
- 10.2 The extent of flooding experienced this year suggest that the previous flood risk studies need to be reviewed to ensure that the community is adequately protected. There are several options over different time scales which need to be assessed in terms of expectations, delivery timescale, cost, stakeholder contributions and outcomes.
- 10.3 Members of the local community and their City and County Council representatives are working together with statutory partners on a long term community flood alleviation scheme. This will ensure that those properties that flooded have access to or knowledge of individual flood protection measures to protect their properties from future flood risk, with individual homeowners taking more responsibility for protecting their own homes thus reducing the future emergency burden on the Council. There is a possibility that Devon Community Foundation funding can be made available to Topsham and if this is the case there should be scope to provide a reasonable interim level of flood defence to most waterside properties.

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Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

None

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