

NEWSLETTER

AUTUMN 2022



NEW CEO TRACEY GARRETT

'Since arriving at the National Flood Forum, I have heard so much about the NFF way of doing things.

The NFF Way

I was curious about what the NFF way meant but now I see it's a deep rooted and passionately held belief in empathy, kindness and a desire to create a place where people can start to unload some of the emotional trauma of being flooded.

From the moment the recovery trailer arrives in an area, the team are starting to connect to people, to offer understanding and kindness, to create a space where a deeply traumatised flood victim can begin the long road to repairing damage, potentially returning home, and recovering from the impacts of the flood.

The NFF way starts with flooded people, listening to and understanding their individual experiences. The NFF way brings together communities and organisations so that a community leads on what happens and how its future flood risk is managed. The NFF way uses strong and productive ways of working to build effective plans.

The Future

As we look to the future its widely accepted climate change impacts will be felt more and more. Flooding is likely to increase over the coming years and we need to make sure we are in a great position to rise to that challenge. We need to make sure that more organisations want to work with us, and more people are able to access our services.



Over our 20 years we have worked with many people, and we would love to do more. Demand for our services is growing and finding ways we can meet that challenge is key.

We want to help as many people as we can and funding is key to achieving that aim. The NFF way is very special and it's this approach that makes me so proud to have become a part of this organisation and all it represents.

RECOVERY

Our recovery team was out and about earlier in the year in the recently flooded areas. We were able to support on many issues.

FLOOD ACTION GROUPS

We have more than 350 Flood Action Groups, each enabling better outcomes for communities.

HELPLINE

Our helpline assists more than 1000 people a year. We are available 365 days a year for all your flood queries.

NFF 20TH ANNIVERSARY

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the National Flood Forum. A celebration event was held at the Bewdley Museum on 18th June.

It was so wonderful to see so many of the people who have contributed to the success of the NFF, and it was also an opportunity to say farewell to outgoing CEO Paul Cobbing and welcome Tracey Garrett.

How It All Began

Peter Barnett one of the founders, reflected on its humble beginnings.

"Bewdley's floods in 1998, 2000 and 2002 were the worst in many years, since the 1940s and it hadn't flooded for decades. Because of this, the place was devastated, nothing was prepared.

"John Illes, a local resident, arranged a meeting at the Baptist church, to see what happened next. At the end of the meeting, it was quite rancorous to say the least, there was a lot of arguing and miscommunications.

"John asked for representatives from around the town as there were distinct flooded communities, to get together and form what we now know as a Flood Action Group.

"We became this little group of people who met on a regular basis, three of those people were myself with John Illes and Gill Holland.

"We pretty much immediately decided what we were going to do and that was not having meetings where people were shouting at each other.



Heather Shepherd introduces Peter Barnett

"And so, from then on, we met as a group on a regular basis but also held very regular meetings to which we invited speakers from the Environment Agency, from climate change experts, from everybody who we felt had something to say. We invited the public to them, and I chaired those and if anybody got out of order, they didn't for long.

Co-operation and Compromise

"It was all about cooperation, compromise, talking with each other because what we found, once we'd started meeting that, lo and behold, if you talk to everybody as an individual as somebody to be respected, they respect you back and you get a consensus and things move forward quickly.

"The group was led by Gill and I and a number of groups sprang up after hearing about what we were doing along the River Severn.

"There were meetings at various town halls, which were totally unstructured. They were like our first meeting when everyone shouted at each other.



Humble beginnings

"Gill led from her "office" which was a room in her house, in Bewdley. Her home was probably the most flooded property in the town.

"Gill had a wealth of knowledge about flooding, and as it hadn't flooded for about 20 years the town's collective understanding of flooding had almost disappeared.

"As people noticed we were starting to have some success in Bewdley we started to get inundated by requests from around the country asking us what we were doing working with different organisations. At the time Gill was working from six in the morning till midnight. If someone wanted help, Gill would give it. In the end, John and I had a meeting and said this can't go on, this needs to be formalised.

"Around the same time Gill, myself and few other volunteers organised the first flood fair because we'd been in touch with so many different manufacturers around the country; some who's products worked and some that didn't, so in a car park in Bewdley we had the first flood fair.

The First Flood Fair and Government Visits

"Five hundred people came from across the country to visit the Flood Fair, which was incredible.

"We were also invited to an event at Downing Street, along with many other flooded communities. The Bewdley MP at the time, arranged for me, John, and Gill to meet with the then Minister for the Environment.



Trustee David Goff leads the toast to the future of the NFF

A Hub of Communities

"We proposed the idea of creating a hub of communities but that we'd need funding. After two years, we got funding to create the National Flood Forum.

"As a next step, we invited various groups that Gill knew from around the country to a central location in Meriden Warwickshire and presented our vision: rather than the government imposing decisions on communities, it empowers their flood groups to work on their behalf and find mutually acceptable solutions.

"This turned everything on its head. Prior to this communication between agencies and communities was awful, and we took command of that communication.

"The first thing we did following this meeting was to form a non-profit company with directors chosen from those attending. We distributed pamphlets around the country, explaining what different groups had done and sharing experiences. It was very important for a long time before we came up with the name The National Flood Forum, the word Forum was so significant because it was about everyone coming together to discuss, to agree and to leave with a solution".

Thank you to Peter for joining us as we celebrated this huge milestone. We have huge gratitude to you and also to John Illes and the late Gill Holland.

From this foundation the NFF has taken the process and honed its engagement and ways of working to be more and more effective.

The respect and search for consensus still forms the basis on which we work, we believe that this approach is most likely to get the best results for the people we work with.

PROJECT FOCUS

Waltham Forest

The July 2021 floods caused destructive surface water flooding in many London boroughs. The devastation caused to people's lives and property led to the formation of coalition in April 2022, comprising Thames Water, the London Borough of Waltham Forest and the National Flood Forum.

"On 25th July this year, 'the big one' finally arrived. We moved our most personal possessions upstairs and joined a group of neighbours bailing water out of back gardens in the hope of saving our house. Water like a raging river coming through the back of garden towards our home is something I still have nightmares about. That day still brings back fearful memories, adrenaline and anxiety. We are still on tenterhooks every time it rains."

The NFF has been working with flooded communities across London to set up three Flood Action Groups in Waltham Forest and two in other areas.

In the aftermath of the July Floods of 2021 the flooded communities working with the NFF have demonstrated strong community resilience.

The Flood Action Groups have begun by clarifying the roles and responsibilities of agencies involved in flood risk management in order to better understand their role in the decision-making process.

"Working with flooded communities across London over the last three months has been an eye-opening experience. These communities have demonstrated an inspiring degree of resilience, despite the significant damage and disruption they have experienced both to their lives and properties. Setting up Flood Action Groups and helping them form partnerships with different organisation's has not been without challenges but being able to provide support and guidance to these communities throughout the process has been extremely fulfilling. Moving forward with the project, I aim to maintain the positive collaboration between stakeholders to ensure this partnership work is sustained. "

Edward Flaherty, NFF Project Officer for Waltham Forest.

"There's definitely been a heightened sense of anxiety since those downpours among those who were worst affected, and for people with young children, it's been especially tough."

We aim to build a constructive partnership between flood risk authorities and flooded communities based on open, honest discussions and collaborative decision making.

Going forward, the Flood Action Groups will bring their experience, local knowledge and vision to cocreate the flood mitigation strategy deployed by the agencies .

"While we hope to be a voice for our local community, and doing everything we can to organise and plan and make possible changes, we obviously need to be plugged in to something bigger, because as Avenue householders, we have no direct influence on Thames Water strategies, and the Councils"

Further into the projects, groups also aim to develop Flood Resilience Plans with the support of the NFF. In addition, the Project Officers have supported individuals with issues as wide ranging as insurance, property flood resilience and resistance and will continue to do so throughout the project.



POLICY

A week is a long time in politics and never more so than the last few months. The NFF has been moving and shaking in politics too. We are now the Secretariat for the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Flood Prevention.

The chair of the group Rachel Maskell MP is a big supporter of flooded communities and is keen to help us make the group dynamic and impactful. Topics on the agenda for the coming year are property flood resilience measures, riparian ownership, levelling up, upland management and coastal erosion and planning. If there is something you would like the APPG to focus on please do drop us a line.

Now more than ever it's key that we engage as many of our politicians as we can with the issues that impact on flooded or at-risk communities. They have the power to raise questions, debate on our behalf and ultimately help to shape future policy.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group works across the House of Commons and the House of Lords, cutting across the political divide and allowing any flavour of party to take part. Any MP or Lord can attend and you can request that your MP comes along to one of our meetings.

Please send your MPs name to info@floodforum.org.uk and we will make sure they get an invitation.

WELCOMING NEW STAFF MEMBER...SARAH BELLAMY



As the newest member of the National Flood Forum, I have learned a lot about the organisation's work and the impact it has on the lives of individuals and communities. The support offered is beneficial to communities and other agencies involved in flood risk management.

My role as a Flood Engagement Officer has required me to study a variety of topics and documentation including relevant legislation and roles and responsibilities of flood risk authorities as well as current reviews and reports. This has allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of our roles, such as why and how procedures and plans are implemented.

Having the opportunity to observe other officers engaging communities in flood action groups and meetings as part of my training has also enabled me to gain insight into how engagement can be successful.

I am looking forward to implementing the skills and knowledge I have gained in future work within Lincolnshire, which is one of the flagship Resilience and Innovation project.

UPCOMING EVENTS

The Flood Forum is working with the Town & Country Planning Association (TCPA) to host two in-person workshops to support people understand the planning system and its role in making areas safer from flood risk.

The workshops aim to support people to navigate the complexities of the planning system and gain confidence in engaging with the planning decisions that affect them. The session will be of benefit to individuals and community groups wishing to ensure that flood risk is identified, considered and appropriate action taken to reduce flood risk.

Event 1: Birmingham

Wednesday 30 November, 6.30-8.30pm,
The Priory Rooms, 40 Bull Street, B4 6AF

Event 2: London

Monday 5 December, 5-7pm,
TCPA, 17 Carlton House Terrace, SW1Y 5AS

Please register via the TCPA website to reserve a place. Click on the links above to sign up.

These workshops are free to attend thanks to support from Flood Re.

Please share this invitation with others that may be interested in attending.

If you have any further questions, please contact
Jean.timmins@floodforum.org.uk - 01299403055

We look forward to seeing you there.

RECOVERY SERVICES

When communities are hit by a flood it is key that the emergency services work with each other, local authorities and the Environment Agency.

As the water recedes our first role at the National Flood Forum is to go into those communities with our recovery services trailer, open our doors and to support flooded people with the stress and trauma that they have just experienced. Our role is to listen, support and enable people and communities to secure the help they need.

We can move into an area where our experienced staff can support Agency and Local Authority work and communicate with all departments once the blue lights have gone.

We provide immediate emotional and practical advice to flood victims from day one by actively listening to the flooded residents, providing advice and support and providing feedback to agencies/authorities about local concerns.

We can also offer this support on a virtual platform.



HOW YOU CAN HELP US



WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT TO HELP US CONTINUE TO SUPPORT FLOODED PEOPLE

When people flood Family ties are ripped apart, you are forced to leave your home, possessions and mementos are destroyed, normality is impacted and the damage is all-consuming.

It can take a year or more to get back into your home after a flood. Floods are much more complex than a simple mop and bucket. Getting your home back to normal after a flood can be filled with challenges that cause unimaginable misery.

That's why we need to ensure the National Flood Forum is here for people. To offer guidance and support, to help navigate stumbling blocks and most importantly as a charity that understands exactly what it is like to flood.

There are many ways to support us to donate visit our website or send by post to National Flood Forum, PO Box 7643, Bewdley, DY12 9BL.

You can also support us as you carry out your everyday shopping. Every donation makes a difference and helps us support more people. Thank you.

