

REPORT ON FLOODING IN AXMINSTER 20/21ST OCTOBER 2021

Overnight on the above dates, Axminster was subject to excessive rainfall of 70 mm, which is normally the average for the whole month of October. This was preceded by a large rainfall the previous night. On both occasions the rain fell over the whole catchment area of the River Axe, which rises in Beaminster, and which receives flows from its various tributaries, large and small, through its passage down to Axmouth.

This meant that the river was already swollen before the rain of 20/21.10.2021. This was exacerbated by it being spring tide, with high tide during the downpour.

Whilst there was drainage, there was nowhere for the water to go except the fields of the floodplain, and also to roads and buildings in its catchment. It should be noted that the heavy rain 8 days later did not cause as many problems because it was neep tide, so water has somewhere to go.

There was flooding at Purzebrook, Weycroft, the roundabout at Millbrook, the Primary School, the Carpet Outlet, Cloakham Lawn Sports centre, Millwey Rise and houses at The Cricketers, Lynch Close and Willhayes Park along with various other properties in town. The Outdoor bowls club at Cloakham had their recently-installed carpet ruined, and the Primary School was closed on the Thursday.

Following the floods of July 2012, the culvert under the railway line which takes the water from the Millbrook into the Axe was increased in size. Whilst there was flooding from the Millbrook, the culvert did its job, but as detailed in the first paragraph the water backed up because it could not disgorge into the Axe. This is substantiated by the fact parts of Seaton were flooded from the rear rather than the seafront.

It is clear that parts of the town were flooded which had never experienced it before, mostly by run off from water soaked fields or play areas. In terms of new developments in town, the balancing tanks, ponds and bunds performed as designed, to only allow drainage at the same rate as the land had it not been built on. There was no evidence of flooding on the Wain Homes, Betterment or Bovis/Linden sites.

Response was good from the Emergency Services, with the Axminster Retained Brigade being called out 30 times. Our thanks must go to our responders who worked valiantly throughout the night. Similarly, the response from EDDC and DCC was good. Axminster Town Council had volunteers out as well, although access to sandbags was impossible due to being locked away, and the padlock would not open. It has to be said that what use these bags would have been at the time is questionable.

Action was taken, and the following Thursday, when a similar storm was forecast, sandbags were made available throughout the town due to a sterling effort by our locum deputy town clerk, Westcrete and several town councillors. Our thanks should go out to them. The box at the Guildhall was unlocked on Thursday 21st October so access should not be hampered should a future storm happen. It would be useful to know how useful residents found the sandbags that were given out.

Recommendations:

1. That the TC's resilience committee which has not met for some years be reconstituted, both to review our plans, and to look forward not just for flooding but also for snow, it being some years since we had a bad snow fall, so, on average, we are due one soon.
2. In light of climate change, we have to expect such rainfall will happen again, and the effects could be more severe and in places we would not predict them. I have spoken to

our locum Deputy Town Clerk who has suggested we place in town, at strategic places bulk storage of sandbags in metal cabinets, locked but with designated councillors having keys to make them available to the public. Possible locations might include, but are not limited to, South St. car park, West St. car park, Millwey Rise (where the old bus shelter is), Coombe Lane car park, Gamberlake, Raymonds Hill (where the telephone box used to be) as well as a larger, more robust one at The Guildhall. Each would be filled with 100-200 bags depending on the hinterland they serve. This would be a costly exercise, but I feel appropriate given the risks we may face. I have asked the locum Deputy Clerk to investigate the costs and logistics of such a project.

3. It was clear that some of the flooding was due to blocked drains and culverts. Whilst the reduction in grass cutting has given biodiversity benefits, DCC should look at more frequent drain clearing. Larger cuttings when it is done take longer to break down and may easily block the drains. They should also look at removing cuttings from vulnerable sites, as is done by the contractors who cut the verges of the by pass for Connect Road Operators on behalf of Highways England. Our own staff need to provide a risk assessment for areas they are responsible for, e.g. grass bank at junction of North St. and Old North St.

4. Many areas of the town have combined sewage and stormwater drainage systems installed well before there was any awareness of the problems caused by climate change and South West Water and Devon County Council need to address this problem. In the newer areas of town these systems are separate.

CLlr J Walden

Chair Axminster Town Council Operations Committee.