

COMMUNITY FLOOD RESILIENCE CASE STUDY: HIGHER FOLDS FLOOD GROUP

BACKGROUND

The Higher Folds estate in Leigh, Wigan is an area where a number of homes are at high risk of flooding from multiple sources. Pen Leach Brook, which is located to the South of the estate, is a designated main river and during extreme events, would be at risk of over-topping. The estate was developed in the 1950s and as a result of land settlement over the years, topographically takes the form of a large basin, resulting in surface water pooling at the lowest point close to the centre of the estate.

As more and more communities across the country are experiencing extreme weather as a result of our changing climate, extreme rainfall events that are capable of exceeding the capacity of the highway drainage system are resulting in localised flooding incidents. In addition, the surface water sewer network which drains the estate and outfalls into Pen Leach Brook, is unable to discharge into the watercourse at times of high-water levels within the river channel. This results in the system backing up and floodwater surcharging through the gullies and manholes.

The estate has flooded several times in recent years, most recently during Storm Christoph in January 2021. The event resulted in the internal flooding of properties at the lowest point of the estate, with the worst affected residents being evacuated by emergency services.

CHALLENGES

Two challenges were identified: Firstly, upgrades to drainage and sewer networks are extremely costly and intrusive and often require additional upgrades to sections of the network further afield. Secondly, Pen Leach Brook is a narrow channel with riparian owner and stakeholder involvement. Although there is no statutory obligation for any local authority to supply sandbags during flood events, Wigan Council responded to the flood as soon as practically possible with sandbags for residents. Unfortunately, properties had already flooded in the meantime. Investigations following Storm Christoph identified the importance of the regular inspection and maintenance of the systems and networks which drain the estate.

SUCESSES

With the support of Wigan Council, The Environment Agency and Newground, residents have organised and formed a flood action group, which has helped to give the community a stronger voice. The group has adopted a constitution, appointed a chairperson, secretary and treasurer, and meet regularly with risk management authorities such as Wigan Council and United Utilities. This has since led to having parts of the sewer network inspected and critical gullies monitored and cleaned.

Higher Folds Flood Group are also engaging with United Utilities and the Environment Agency around the maintenance of Pen Leach Brook. They have visited the Environment Agency operated 'Bedford Pumping Station' to learn more about how the station benefits the Higher Folds estate, as well as the critical role it plays in reducing flood risk by managing levels within watercourses around the area.

The flood group are currently working with Newground and other agencies to develop a community emergency flood plan in order to plan and prepare for future flood events and assist those most vulnerable during a flood event. The ongoing work of the group and risk management authorities will help to manage flood risk to the estate.

Group members are aware that flood risk cannot be fully eliminated and while their community emergency flood plan cannot prevent the area flooding, it can help to provide a coordinated response and reduce the impact of future floods.



Images: Kerry Cunningham - Higher Folds estate, Wigan.