

CASE STUDY: CHURCHTOWN, LANCASHIRE

Churchtown is a small conservation village of approximately 84 homes in North West England, equal distance from Preston, Blackpool and Lancaster. It is bordered on three sides by two rivers, the Wyre and Ainspool. The River Wyre was enclosed by embankments after serious flooding in 1980 and the Ainspool River was enclosed as a flood mitigation measure in 1987. This actually caused problems to worsen at the East (Ainspool) end of the village, as previously the Ainspool had been able to leave channel and spread over many fields to the North. The installation of the embankments increased flow towards Churchtown and its bridges which act as pinch points.

Churchtown flooded as a result of Storm Desmond on the 5th December 2015. During and immediately after Storm Desmond, no Flood Risk Management Authority or emergency vehicles went to Churchtown, as the flooding throughout Lancashire was too widespread.

Churchtown flooded again in August 2016, and although the situation had changed and some practical help was received, the village's flood defences were more or less the same as they were in December 2015. The Flood Action Group (FLAG) decided that the only course of action was to try and raise the money themselves to build a flood defence.



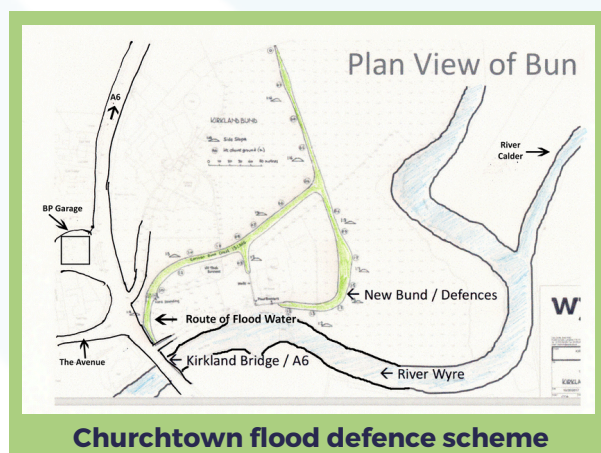
Map of Churchtown

Solution

The basic idea for a flood defence in the form of a bund originated from two of the residents who come from several generations of farmers living alongside the two rivers. They knew the area and understood what needed to be done. Wyre Borough Council provided the FLAG with a useful topographical study, and after preliminary designs and costings were established by the group, funding applications to the Princes Trust and the Community Foundation for Lancashire were made. The cost of the scheme was estimated to be in the region of £100,000. Unfortunately, the FLAG failed to obtain the money from the Princes Trust as they didn't own the land on which the flood defence bund was to be built. An application for funding was put to The Community Foundation for Lancashire and Merseyside who awarded the FLAG £10,000 and United Utilities also contributed £20,000. After a conversation with the Chief Engineer of Wyre Borough Council, there was fresh hope in the form of funding from the Grant in Aid / Local Levy from the Environment Agency (EA).

At this point the FLAG had;

- A topographical study
- Estimates
- Permission from four landowners
- £30,000 of funding
- A contractor prepared to adapt the plans
- Working drawings
- Project manager who knew how to navigate his way through the administration process



Churchtown flood defence scheme

Image provided by: Churchtown Flood Action Group

The scheme

The Wyre area 'Making Space for Water' technical group met in March of 2018 and Paul Bond from the EA presented the project to them on behalf of the FLAG. They unanimously agreed to help, and several meetings were arranged between the EA, Churchtown FLAG, and Wyre Borough Council's Engineers Department and legal department. This resulted in a successful application for Grant in Aid funding from the EA to enable the FLAG to undertake the scheme. Churchtown was possibly the first FLAG to access the Grant in Aid Fund, as it is usually reserved for Flood Risk Management Authorities. Before building work could begin the EA required a favourable business case and bespoke permit which included a flood risk assessment and modelling report.

The dry summer of 2018 offered favourable ground conditions for building the defence bund, but a delay in obtaining the bespoke permit meant that by the time it was received, the wet weather had arrived. Although the clay core for the bund was completed in just six weeks, the project wasn't finished until March 2019.



Image: Churchtown Flood Action Group
Bund under construction

There is a large section of the flood defence that encloses a property which operates as a business, it was agreed that this part of the scheme would incorporate pre cast concrete blocks and a flood gate to allow access, as the owners did not want a large clay embankment surrounding their property.

The landowners who were involved in the scheme had to re-register their properties with the Land Registry to include the flood defence on their land and agree to its maintenance.

Churchtown and the villagers concerned have all installed property flood resilience (PFR) measures. The new flood defences should go some way towards defending it.



Image: Churchtown Flood Action Group

Flood gate with pre cast concrete flood wall

What has the Flood Action Group achieved?

Worked collaboratively with partner groups and organisations

- Contributed information to three Government reviews and enquiries.
- Wrote to all 200+ Lancashire Parish Councils and 16 Lancashire MPs in an effort to encourage them to meet regularly and coordinate their approach to flooding in rural Lancashire.
- Meet regularly with the Wyre Water Catchment Partnership.
- Support other FLAGs in the area by attending inaugural meetings, providing a template constitution, etc.
- Attend North West Regional Flood and Coastal Committee meetings.
- Regularly attend The Wyre Flood Forum in an effort to keep Churchtown's flooding issues at the forefront of any planning/action to be taken.

Raised funding

- Raised the funds to stage a very successful conference at Myerscough College to inform residents of their flood risk.
- Raised money to equip all flood group wardens with water proof torches, waders and a high-viz jacket.
- Campaigned for the purchase of two powerful, portable pumps to which the group now have access.
- Raised money and purchased 18 grit-bins which have been distributed around the village and filled with sandbags and plastic sheeting by Wyre Borough Council.
- Together with the EA and Wyre Trust Partners, Churchtown FLAG are involved in a government natural flood management (NFM) scheme to install attenuation ponds and leaky dams on the rivers Ainspool and Wyre. The research, costing £80,000, is almost complete and funding is being sourced.

Provided support

- Organised a 'Meet and Greet' information evening for residents who had bought houses after Storm Desmond.
- Identified vulnerable residents in the area.
- The FLAG meets every month, issues regular newsletters, and updates the Churchtown FLAG site and Lancashire Flood Action Groups on Facebook.
- Supported Liverpool University and University of Central Lancashire degree students with dissertations based on the Churchtown flooding experience.

Provided flood research information

- Written a 'History of the Flooding of Churchtown from 1980' that was sent to all local Flood Risk Management Authorities and Government Ministers.
- Provided University of Central Lancashire staff with a research proposal into the relationship between insurance companies and flood victims.
- Produced films covering the 2016 flooding and also the building of the flood defence bund.

Community planning

- Appointed flood wardens.
- Formulated an early warning system.
- Contributed to a pumping strategy.

- **The Churchtown FLAG entered and were successful in winning 'The Project Excellence Award for Community Leadership 2018' from the EA. The award was presented at the EA conference in March by the Chairman Emma Howard Boyd.**
- **On the 21 August 2019, Lord Shuttleworth the Lord Lieutenant of Lancashire and the Chairman of the Community Foundation for Lancashire officially opened the Churchtown flood defence.**
- **Churchtown FLAG is one of the foremost FLAG'S in England and has shown, despite the difficulties, what a determined small band of people can achieve.**
- **Their project was entered in the 'Community Partnership' category at the 2022 Flood and Coast Excellence Awards and won .**