

In autumn 2000 over 140 houses in Bewdley (north-west Worcestershire, population 10,000) were flooded from the river Severn, some to a depth of 1.3 m. Bewdley has a long history of flooding, but had not experienced a flood this severe since 1947 (when the level was 0.28m. higher).

Bewdley Baptist Church, which had been operating as an Information Centre during the flooding, called a public meeting for those affected, and volunteers representing each flooded area were formed into Bewdley Residents' Flood Committee.

The aim was to provide a forum for residents' representatives and local agencies to meet, exchange ideas and assist one another in learning from past experience to plan for the future.

In particular the Committee has tried to review the experiences of residents and deal with problem areas, assist individuals with information on the management of future floods, provide a forum on flood prevention planning, and liaise with the Environment Agency on behalf of the public regarding permanent prevention schemes.

The Committee has now been working for just over a year and the first phase of the Bewdley Flood Alleviation Scheme is being built, which will protect about a quarter of the town, with the second phase protecting the rest of the right bank. (Houses on the left bank will not qualify for defences under the current benefit/cost rules.)

The Bewdley Residents' Flood Committee has provided a platform for the EA to put forward their plans, and a forum for the plans to be discussed, to the benefit of all parties. It has worked closely with the Local Authority, Police and other Agencies to ensure that a cohesive local plan to deal with future floods meets the needs of the local population.

In order for local householders to see flood protection products for themselves, the Committee mounted, in June 2000, the first-ever flood defence fair to be held in the UK. This attracted thirty-four trade stands and over five hundred visitors who included flood-affected residents, researchers, academics, emergency planners, council officials and EA officers.

The amount of interest the fair generated, and the requests for information that have followed since, demonstrated a widespread and urgent need for an independent national office to disseminate information and bring the scattered population affected by flooding together.

In response, three members of the Bewdley group have now set up a not-for profit company to run The National Flood Forum. This is an independent public organisation dedicated to helping those affected by flooding.

With all predictions pointing to increased dangers from flooding over the coming years, The National Flood Forum aims to provide assistance to communities at risk by:

- ?? assisting in the formation of effective local action groups
- ?? developing a national network and forum for the community groups

- ?? providing a resource centre on all aspects of defending, renovating and coping with a flooded property
- ?? organising Flood Fairs across the country to give access to flood protection products and encourage self-help
- ?? producing a website and newsletters including contributions from resident groups within the network
- ?? giving those affected by flooding a strong and cohesive voice in working with agencies and organisations such as Insurance Companies, Local Authorities and the Environment Agency.

The National Flood Forum is particularly keen to make contact with existing residents' flood groups. It will also be able to offer practical assistance in the setting up of flood action groups, help with information on flooding and flood protection, and provide an on-going forum for flood discussion.

To contact the National Flood Forum, e-mail: bewdley-flood@lineone.net