

Summary of Public Flooding Meeting held at the Castle Community Rooms in Framlingham on Sunday 21st January 2024

We convened this public meeting to listen to the views of experts and answer questions from the public. We had over 130 residents and businesses attending. This is viewed as the first of a number of events to keep the Fram community informed and involved in the solution to the flooding on the 20th of October 2023.

The main speaker was Leigh Parrot from Amazi, a civil engineer specialising in flooding. Her key expertise is in understanding land drainage and flood modelling. As the Council's flooding consultant and expert, she outlined how she will work with the community to produce an independent report on what happened, identifying the root cause of the flooding and advising us on how to prevent and be more resilient in the future.

We believe Suffolk County Council's (SCC) official report is likely to take up to 18 months - we aim to push the agenda along more quickly, and Leigh's report will enable us to provide evidence-based information for funding bids for prevention and recovery plans.

Panel Members:

Mark Benbow (Meeting Chair, Framlingham Town Council)
Ellie Beecroft (SCC's Flood Investigations Manager)
Stephen Burroughes (County Councillor)
Aaron Dixey (Area Flood Risk Manager- Environment Agency)
Owen Grey (District Councillor)
Matt Hullis (SCC's Head of Environment Strategy)
Vince Langdon-Morris (District Councillor)
Ben McFarland (Suffolk Wildlife Trust)
Leigh Parratt (Amazi – Flooding Consultant)
Will Todd (Environment Agency)

Key Points Discussed:

The panel each introduced themselves and Leigh Parratt gave a report on her commission, what she intends to do and some of her initial findings. She also showed maps of Framlingham's river catchment and surface water and flood zones, outlining the complex nature of flooding and its causes. She confirmed the view that similar extreme events were now more likely to occur again due to Climate Change.

Framlingham Town Council's response to the flooding:

Coordinated efforts with other organisations.
Established Flooding Recovery and Resilience Group which has met four times since the flooding.
Commissioned Leigh Parratt to produce a flood report for the Town.
Worked with Suffolk Resilience Forum and revised its Emergency Plan.
Emphasised collaboration and learning from best practices.
Contributed to the Hour Community Flood Fund.

The following issues were questions submitted prior to the event and were collated into key themes:

Dredging the Mere:

The “bathtub overflow” analogy was used to express the necessity for the water to have somewhere to run off to, regardless of how much water is held.

Suffolk Wildlife Trust (SWT) mentioned the dredging undertaken 30 years ago but considers that had it been dredged more recently, it wouldn't have significantly impacted the flooding during Storm Babet.

Leigh suggested strategic interventions and possible reservoir considerations. The Environment Agency (EA) explained this would work by having additional space in the water containment area – this would mean building up banks around the Mere which would severely impact the look of it.

Issues with debris left by SWT after works near the Mere were acknowledged; SWT to investigate and clear and look into securing fallen trees left in situ.

Drainage Issues in Station Road and Well Close Square:

Concerns have been raised about blocked drains and gullies in Station Road.

SCC acknowledged the problem and plans to use Highways Reporting Tool for investigation.

Frustration expressed about the lack of action and the need for government funding.

River Clearing and Flood Prevention Grants:

Questions raised about river debris and riparian rights enforcement.

Environment Agency explained the impact of dredging and the need for strategic interventions.

SCC outlined the flood prevention grant requirements and challenges, emphasising the need for independent surveys and the conditions attached to the £5,000 Resilience Grants – they confirmed that these rules come from DEFRA and not SCC.

Surface Water Flooding in Station Road:

Frequent surface water flooding in Station Road was discussed. SCC highlighted it as a drainage issue, with ongoing work ordered and Anglian Water involvement too.

Snape Floodgates and Framlingham Flooding:

The EA representative dismissed the suggestion that Snape floodgates caused Framlingham flooding - and noted Framlingham is 28 metres above sea level.

He emphasised the role of bridges and counterbalance gates and explained how the floodgates work.

Flooding in Fairfield Road and Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) on the new estate:

Concerns about flooding linked to the Castle Keep housing estate.

Neighbourhood Plan discussed; SUDS issues acknowledged.

SCC advised follow drainage standards and work with developers.

Farmers' Role in Flood Reduction:

Emphasis on farmers' role in reducing flooding through maintaining drains and ditches.

Need for guidance and cooperation between authorities and farmers. Farmers are often given mixed messages or asked to conduct works by one authority and forbidden from carrying out the same works by another!

East Suffolk Catchments Plan:

The role of Essex and Suffolk Rivers Trust was discussed.

SCC considered the Plan but highlighted its limited legislative weight.

Emphasised gathering information to reduce risks.

Local Barriers and Flood Warning System:

Questions about local barriers' effectiveness.

Flood warning system and the three levels of alert explained by the Environment Agency.

Residents expressed concerns about the rapid rise of water on 20th October and suggested a flood alarm warning system. EA hesitant to recommend this for a range of reasons.

Overall themes and ways forward:

- Collaboration must continue between various authorities and organisations
- Challenges in implementing flood prevention measures.
- The importance of strategic interventions and long-term planning.
- Concerns about the impact of recent developments on flooding.
- Need for improved communication and information dissemination.
- Many residents are not aware of their riparian rights and responsibilities.
- We will know much more when Amazi's report has been published. We intend for this to be presented at the Town's Annual Parish Meeting in April.

Summary of Attendees' Feedback:

Residents expressed a mix of satisfaction, constructive suggestions and specific criticisms that the Resilience & Recovery Group will consider ahead of future meetings.

Positive Comments:

The meeting was deemed worthwhile, well organised and interesting by many, especially the Q&A section.

Recognition that the meeting was well-chaired, with useful information from the panel and Leigh Parratt's expertise was acknowledged.

Acknowledgment of Framlingham Town Council's effective work since the flooding.

Thanks for the informative and well-put-together event.

Suggestions and Criticisms:

There were several criticisms about the long introductions which meant they was less time for the Q&A session.

There was frustration that several members of the public kept interrupting, and some audience members were allowed to speak repeatedly and some not at all.

There were criticisms about the apparent passing of responsibility by SCC and the EA.

There was dissatisfaction with the sound system and audio quality from several attendees (affecting those on Zoom as well) - it would have been better if speakers had stood up and the microphones were not loud or clear enough.

Representation from Framlingham College, Anglian Water, Highways, DEFRA, Natural England and local farmers was recommended for future meetings.

There was a surprising absence of discussion on climate change despite its relevance.

Those online would have liked to have joined in the discussion too.

Overall, the feedback included both positive comments. There was also areas for improvement in terms of the meeting structure, content, and the audience's audio/visual experience - both in the room and online.