

**B&NES Planning, Transport and Environmental Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel**

**Meeting 16 September 2014**

The Chew Valley Flood Forum would like to raise the following concerns regarding the “Enhanced” Property Level Protection (PLP) scheme for 70 properties, currently in progress in Chew Magna.

There is a danger that the mistakes of the previous B&NES/Environment Agency (EA) PLP scheme in 2010/2011 are being repeated. Compromises are being made due to time and perhaps also cost pressures, and the new scheme may result in sub-optimal protection for householders. Expectations are fading that the scheme will be comprehensive and robust. The EA, who are project managing the scheme, is proposing legal agreements with householders that could be onerous and potentially confusing, and lack important details regarding contractor liabilities and product warranties. The draft agreements state the EA “can not guarantee any aspect of the quality, condition or fitness for purpose of the PLP measures”.

The same firm that fitted the original PLP has been awarded the current contract on the basis that it is the only contractor currently on the EA’s preferred contractor list and a new competition would delay installation into next year. There are concerns about inviting the same contractor back into the community, where nearly 30% of the 31 properties that flooded experienced water ingress under flood boards during the floods in 2012. We are being told by the EA that the firm’s products have improved. However we have yet to see any evidence that this firm’s products and installation work are the best in the market, based on findings from the EA’s national pilot schemes.

Confidence has been further eroded by the following:

- a) the firm intends to use contractors for the installation who will have had 4 days in-house training and may not have had any previous experience
- b) only a selection of homes will be wet-tested following installation. The expectation was that all homes would be wet-tested – as would happen if the flood boards had been bought privately from the firm.
- c) initial feedback from the community on the site surveys that have been conducted is mixed regarding clarity on what products will be installed and how.

The EA appears to be managing the project on a “re-active” and “catch up” basis. B&NES’s funding was available at the start of this financial year. The current estimate for first installations is November. We are not aware of project documentation such as scope, escalation process and timetable. There does not seem to be a clear process on Acceptance Criteria to enable sign-off of installed PLP products nor clarity about products not supplied by the chosen contractor e.g. who installs them, warranties, maintenance agreements.

The impression given is that we should not challenge or raise concerns as this will cause delay. Whilst we would have wished to have the PLP in place well before winter (the 2012 flooding occurred in September and November) we are also concerned that pressure on the contractor to meet deadlines that may not be achievable, could adversely affect the quality of the PLP installation.

We are not clear what B&NES’s involvement is in the project. However we feel that going forward it is essential to have a consultative/co-ordinating group, led by B&NES as the Lead Flood Authority, incorporating representatives from the EA, Bristol Water, relevant Parish Councils and CVFF, to consider all future matters relating to flooding and protective/preventative measures. This was proposed by B&NES many months ago, but, as yet, has not been implemented. If such a group was already in place, we feel sure the evident shortcomings with the project management of the current scheme would have been avoided.

Chew Valley Flood Forum

**Officer response:**

The Environment Agency as project lead and the Council as Lead Local Flood Authority, whilst disappointed the Chew Valley Flood Forum did not approach the Project Team direct with their concerns, have provided the Forum with a formal response to the individual issues they have raised. Further information will be provided when available, but they wish to assure the Panel and the Forum that they are committed in working together to reach an arrangement on this project to the benefit of all the parties involved in so far as reasonably practicable.