

Flood risk in Bath – Scrutiny Panel Meeting – 20 July 2015

The Options Study promised a “holistic” approach to flood risk in the city including upstream of Pulteney Bridge but this is completely absent. There are just proposals for piecemeal replacement of the Pulteney and Twerton gates.

Why is flood risk given such low priority in B&NES? There are two answers: (i) perceived cost and (ii) failure to understand the implications of flooding.

B&NES assert that it is not for them to address flood risk from main rivers. But money is found for flood defences where there are new developments, which are used to justify B&NES involvement.

Absence of development is used to justify inaction in other parts of the city including parts of the historic centre. However, this ignores the huge potential cost to B&NES and its Council Tax payers of not acting. Current assumptions that flooding is an issue confined to a small number of people and to be left to others to address needs to be challenged. I will mention just a few of the things that a proper assessment should take into account. These are impacts at floods of no more than the current 1 in 100 risk level (ie not including the increase to allow for climate change)¹.

1. **The direct financial cost of damage to infrastructure and clearing up** will be massive – in a 2010 report to B&NES cost in a large flood event suggests about £30 million. What would the cost be now?
2. **Indirect financial costs:**
 - The loss of tourism as a result of the Somerset Levels flooding affected the whole county, not just flooded areas, and has been estimated at £200 million². With 2 million visits³ annually to the top ten attractions in Bath, B&NES income from its attractions⁴ will take the largest hit when footage of Great Pulteney Street surrounded by water containing sewage is beamed around the world and bookings collapse.
 - There will be a massive cost to all local businesses – not just those in zones that are flooded. Most retail businesses will have no staff and no customers because access to the city along main roads will be almost impossible at floods less than the current 1 in 100 risk level (not including climate change). Southgate will be partially flooded and will have to be evacuated⁵.
3. **Human costs**
 - There will be substantial human (as well as financial) cost in having to evacuate vulnerable people from retirement homes and schools along the river.
 - There are well documented⁶ impacts of flooding on health and mortality.

¹ Environment Agency maps “[Risk of flooding from River and Sea](#)” – see areas at “Medium” risk

² <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-28468095> - data attributed to Visit Somerset

³ B&NES website Tourism and the Visitor Economy <http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/services/your-council-and-democracy/local-research-and-statistics/wiki/tourism-and-visitor-economy>

⁴ £14.2 million turnover, £5.2 million profit for B&NES in 2013/14 – [Heritage Services Review 2013/14](#)

⁵ Operational Flood Management Plan, Southgate, Bath. DTZ, Nov. 2009

⁶ See review in Fewtrell, “[Carlisle Flooding Health Impact Assessment](#)”, April 2011: Excess mortality may include heart attacks and other fatalities due to reduced access to health care services as well as accidents

What doesn't seem to be realised is that the whole city will come to a standstill because of the flooded main roads. Look at the flood maps (footnote 1). Emergency services will be compromised because their staff can't get to work. Many residents and businesses who are not actually flooded will be affected because of failure of water supplies and sewage and other utilities.

Some B&NES officers may think that B&NES is not responsible for these matters but the widespread impact on businesses that are flooded and unflooded businesses who suffer financial impacts from reduced access to the city during flooding or ongoing losses due to the longer term impact on tourism will obviously have a substantial effect on B&NES income from rents and business rates to add to the reductions in income from B&NES's heritage sites. B&NES may think that they are not liable for much of the cost, but will those who suffer the losses agree when they discover that B&NES were aware of the risk (in many areas classed as "Significant" or "High" by the Environment Agency), were aware that the risk was increasing due to climate change, and yet chose not to act?

We are told the cost of work to improve flood protection for existing residents would be several million. This is trivial compared to the cost of a major flood. I urge the Panel to insist that improving flood protection for existing residents be given much higher priority and that a proper holistic approach **including consideration of flood risk upstream of Pulteney Bridge** be adopted to look at the options for reducing flood risk within Bath. This needs to be done before the next great flood happens.

I do not suggest that Bath is the only part of B&NES at risk of flooding, but the impact of flooding in Bath as B&NES's economic powerhouse would be disastrous for B&NES's finances

Ceris Humphreys

Resident – Henrietta Road

caused by flooding such as carbon monoxide poisoning and collapsing structures such as bridges or walls.