

AUTUMN AND WINTER 2019-20 FLOOD EVENTS IN WORCESTERSHIRE

October and November 2019 flood event summary

During October 2019 successive storms and heavy rainfall created saturated ground conditions, which led to widespread surface water flooding, smaller watercourse flooding and then subsequent flooding of the larger rivers in the County.

The most significant surface water flooding since 2007 resulted in impacts on residential properties across North Worcestershire and in the District of Wychavon, with widespread flooding on the highway network (with over one hundred roads closed at one point) and many school closures.

Flooding on the main rivers led to property, business and infrastructure impacts at a number of locations along the Vale of Evesham, the Teme Valley and the Severn Valley.

124 residential properties and businesses were flooded or significantly impacted.

Due to the ground conditions remaining totally saturated, smaller more localised floods continued to occur during December 2019 and into January 2020. In total, during the autumn and winter period the County Council's Highways teams recorded 8 flood events (where roads needed to be closed and severe weather storm rooms were put in place to manage impacts).

February and March 2020 flood event summary

February 2020 was the wettest February on record in the UK and England experienced the 5th wettest winter since records began in 1862.

Following the wet autumn and early winter, this led again to widespread and significant flooding, particularly along the main rivers.

The River Teme came close to reaching its highest ever recorded level and Tenbury was badly flooded.

The River Severn reached its highest ever recorded level in Worcester and created significant impacts along much of its length through the County and beyond. The river was at flood warning level for the longest period since the flood warnings system began.

For 24 consecutive days there was an equivalent of more than 100 London double-decker buses of water passing through Bewdley every minute.

682 residential properties and 258 businesses in Worcestershire were flooded or seriously impacted and parts of the highway network were seriously impacted or closed at varying times.

Response to the flood events

The collective and significant response to both periods of flooding by the Risk Management Authorities, responders and communities was generally well received.

The County Council played a prominent role in the response effort via functions including Highways, Communications, Emergency Planning, Flood Risk Management, Public Health and Social Care.

During both major flood event periods, the multi-agency Emergency Response Framework was put into operation (Gold, Silver & Bronze functions). Its co-ordination work included:

- Overall co-ordination of activities between different partners
- Creation of local hublets at key flood locations
- Welfare visits to impacted residents and businesses
- Evacuation of key locations
- Temporary accommodation provision.

The broad Highways & Transport effort typified Worcestershire County Council's response. Its activities included:

- Establishment of storm rooms in North and South Worcestershire at its main operational depots
- Investigation and ongoing clearance/maintenance of drainage infrastructure
- Management of road restrictions, closures and re-openings
- Communications & co-ordination – management via the Highways Control Centre and customer service team
- Working closely with the Environment Agency, District Councils, police and other key parties
- Major deployment of flood signage & diversions as necessary
- Sandbag deployment.

The capacity and responsiveness of key services to have a 24/7 capability to respond, was critical to the success of the management of the flood events. This was augmented by the dedication and commitment of those delivering the various services for the Council, working together with other key partners.

Many of the existing flood defences and other flood adaptation schemes and the major combined response effort, prevented the series of floods resulting in even greater impacts for communities across the County.

Recovery from the flood events

The Council has taken the lead in setting up a County Wide Flood Recovery Group. This was put in place during the latter stages of the flood events and is currently ongoing.

Only 10 days after the River Severn at Bewdley fell below flood warning level on 13 March 2020 the Government announced the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdown, which clearly hampered the initial ongoing recovery effort to some degree. The Recovery Group has taken on this challenge with its key partners continuing working together on critical areas, including:

- Community resilience and support
- Support grants and distribution (which includes a £250k Community Response Fund provided by the County Council)
- Improving and repairing existing drainage and highways infrastructure
- Future flood works and schemes.

An example of adaptation during the COVID-19 outbreak, can be seen in how the County Council is helping deal with community recovery. Plans which were well underway for the National Flood Forum's community recovery trailer to tour the flood

impacted parts of the County, have been innovatively adapted into ‘virtual’ recovery support sessions.

These sessions, which are ongoing throughout June and possibly beyond, are supported by all of the Risk Management Authorities and similar sessions are being rolled out in neighbouring counties with more to follow.

Investigations and a review of activities during the flood events

Investigations into the various floods are currently ongoing. COVID-19 has understandably delayed this process, with many County Council and other partner Officers being engaged in the management of the outbreak over the last 3 months and ongoing. Once the investigations have been completed, the report/s will be made available as appropriate.