

# Managing flood risk through people power

## Where and Who

**Region:** South West

**Area:** Devon & Cornwall

**Teams:** NCPMS, Asset System Management, NEAS, HO Corporate Affairs Community Relations team

## What

Shaldon lies on the Teign Estuary, and in deciding how best to respond to the tidal flood risk in this area we wanted to work with the local community. We are piloting a new way of working with the people affected by our work in line with the principles of the Building Trust with Communities guide.

As far as the public was concerned the main flood risk in Shaldon was from surface water when it rained. Although there had been some minor tidal flooding we wanted people to understand – and be convinced of – the serious risk facing the village. We needed to provide the community with an understanding of the science that is used to predict floods and explain the terminology and jargon involved.



## Cost

£200k on flood scheme appraisal. There were also funds from Head Office for the integration of Building Trust with Communities pilot work.

Costs should be offset by savings in subsequent phases. The community has engaged with the process, and it is therefore expected that the resulting solutions will be accepted.

## How

### How we did it.

Building Trust with Communities is about improving the way we communicate with everyone, being more open and seeking to work together. This approach will help us understand the public's concerns, interests and priorities and we can work with them in developing the solution.

Instead of the traditional approach of presenting our preferred solution to the local residents in Shaldon we took a blank sheet of paper and asked for their input.

Between March and October 2005 we raised awareness of the flood risk, and gauged levels of acceptance of the reality of the risk. Mail shots invited 6,000 people to express their views as well as attend an exhibition and public meeting. 250 people came to the public events and we had 146 questionnaires returned. We used the exhibitions to further our knowledge about flooding in the village. Those affected by flooding were asked to put a flag in the map to show the location. As a result, drainage and surface water run-off issues were identified as problems. The mapping exercise was useful when developing solutions to these problems with the Highways and Drainage authorities.

A liaison group, representing all interested parts of the community, considered all the different potential solutions to tidal flood risk and then eliminated those inappropriate for Shaldon. Since then we have been working on the

options for responding to the local flood risk and have seen a real increase in the understanding of flood issues. We developed a single plan which included project management, engineering, Environmental Impact Assessment and communications requirements. We also found that using professional external facilitators to mentor the project team was extremely useful. They managed any conflict and encouraged contributions from everyone.

The results of these deliberations will be taken to the Shaldon community via another exhibition. Although the final outcome has not yet been decided, the process of 'engage - deliberate - decide' has won the trust of the community in Shaldon. By 2009 we should have a design for the chosen solution and we will start construction, funding permitting. In the interim we do have an incident plan in case of a flood.

## Challenges

We had to establish mutual trust with the community and deal with uncertainty. By making sure everyone got the same information at the same time we minimised misinformation. The Environment Agency would normally simply present a solution, so this felt like a very different way of working, as the community was invited to help investigate their own issues.

The project challenges were overcome by appropriate preparation, clear communications and having an advocate that believed in the process.

## What we'd do differently

We have been conducting the public liaison process through a series of evening meetings. Discussions often return to decisions made at earlier meetings because some people couldn't attend. It would be useful to make sure that everyone who has an interest in a decision is at the relevant meeting.

We would do more staff skills training prior to - rather than during - the process, although it is always easier to learn when you are working on something real.

## Aspects of Making Space for Water

Effective stakeholder engagement in decision-making and communication of risk.

### Partners

Shaldon and Ringmore community  
Shaldon Parish Council  
South West Water  
Devon County Council (Highways)  
Teignbridge District Council  
(planning, roads, biodiversity) the  
Environmental Impact Assessment  
team and consultees such as Natural  
England, local businesses and MPs.

### Cost

£200k.

### Timing and Status

March 2005 - 2010. The group  
will take the results of its  
deliberations to the wider  
community in June 2007.

For further information contact: Dave Hart or Kevin Baker



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