

News from our County Councillor  
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Broadband: At last there is more information available regarding the future of broadband for our division. I have, therefore, invited Town Councillors from Wells and Parish Councillors from all the villages in the division to a meeting at the end of January when Karen O’Kane - Programme Director, Better Broadband for Norfolk, will explain what speeds our parishes can expect to receive and in which tranche. Karen will also be able to answer any questions from Councillors regarding their area which they can then feed back at the town and parish councils.

#### Prime Minister’s Visit to Wells:

During the visit the weather was pleasant, the tide was well out across the marshes. I explained how the sea had crossed the marshes, risen above the sea wall, crossed the quayside, pavement and road. I then pointed to the East Quay road sign at and the height to which the sea had risen up the sign. The PM was quite startled and said this had a deeper effect on him than sitting in Cobra and being provided simply with facts.

I also took the opportunity to ask about the future situation regarding insurance for flood risk areas. He assured me the current arrangement between the government and insurance companies had been extended whilst a new arrangement was being negotiated. Subsequent to the visit there was a subsequent debate in Parliament and I hope to provide further information next month.

As many of you will now the mobile ‘phone systems went down during at a particularly worrying time of the flood. Was it fortuitous or not that they were still down during the Prime Minister’s visit? It was certainly noted by his security staff.

The Quay Editor also talked with the PM and may be sharing this conversation with her readers?

Blakeney Marsh: It is over a year ago since the combined efforts of our division put a halt to proposals by Natural England to “zone off” a section of Blakeney Marsh, endangering a whole range of activities that have taken place on the marshes for generations. A short while ago the newly-appointed Environment Minister, George Eustice MP, announced a further set Marine Conservation Zone sites to be designated by Natural England. Blakeney was not on the list, but we are worried that a new minister might not appreciate, as his predecessor did, the strength of local feeling about such proposals. Norman Lamb has asked for a meeting with George Eustice, so we can explain to him how important it is that the plans for Blakeney are not resurrected. The petition to Richard Benyon, the previous minister, was a key factor in saving Blakeney marsh. If you are able and willing to sign the new petition calling on the Minister to stop any plans by Natural England to zone off Blakeney Marsh visit [www.normanlamb.org.uk/Blakeney](http://www.normanlamb.org.uk/Blakeney), fill in your name and email and you will be sending an email to the Minister calling on him to make sure that people continue to be able to use Blakeney Marsh as they have for generations.

## **WELLS FLOOD ACTION PLAN**

### **Joint Co-ordinators Mike and Marie Strong**

The Flood of 5 December 2014 – which exceeded not only the flood level of 1978 but of 1953

First and foremost our thanks to fellow members of the Wells Flood Warden Team who carried out their remit of warning and informing in an exemplary manner. An opinion reinforced by Richard Cook, NNDC Civil Contingencies Manager, who wrote thanking us and our team for outstanding efforts without which ‘what we achieved would not have been possible’. The work of the team enabled the NNDC staff to focus on other parishes along the coast.

#### **Lead up to the flood:**

We received an initial flood alert on the late afternoon of Wednesday 4 December and discussed the potential danger with NNDC Civil Contingencies Manager; we then contacted our Wardens requesting attendance at a briefing 9.00 a.m. on Thursday morning and made contact with those listed in the Flood Plan regarding potential support. Early Thursday morning we completed calls then met with the Wardens – some of whom had already commenced their duties. Throughout the day we maintained contact with the NNDC Civil Contingencies staff, the Environment Agency Floodline Incident Room and Silver Command at North Walsham. As the day progressed such was the concern at Silver Command that for the first time ever Flood Wardens

were given the same powers as the police. The value of a team with local knowledge was seen as vital to the police and as each police sergeant came on duty they came to the Team's control room and discussed actions to be taken; the senior Environment Agency officer on duty similarly kept in contact with us and the Wells fire crew also checked in and asked what help they could give.

#### **Warnings:**

As well as direct contact with the emergency services we, along with the relevant sector Wardens received, the Environment Agency automated warnings – landline, mobile 'phone, text and emails. Indeed everyone registered with the Environment Agency to receive flood warnings and who were at risk received the following messages:

**Wednesday 4 December 5.36 pm** The Environment Agency's automated message was sent to all at risk and registered with the EA:

This is an early alert to notify of the probability of flood warnings being issued on Thursday morning for the Thursday 5th December evening tide at 8pm. The forecast tide height at Wells is 4.83m and includes The Norfolk Coast from Old Hunstanton to Weybourne, including Wells-next-the-sea. Low lying coastal land and roads will be affected first. Be prepared.

**Thursday 5 December 5.35 am** The EA's message again sent to all at risk and registered for messages:

**A Severe Flood Warning** has been issued for the North Norfolk Coast at Wells Quay. Important Information. Severe Flooding. Danger to life. A Severe Flood Warning has been issued by the Environment Agency for the North Norfolk Coast at Wells Quay. The forecast high water is due at 8:00 pm on Thursday 5th December 2013. Flooding is expected for the quay and waterside properties in Wells-next-the-Sea.

The predicted astronomical tide level is 2.960 m AODN. The forecast surge height is 1.896 m. The forecast tide level is 4.856 m AODN. The forecast wind direction is North West. The forecast wind strength is force 7. Make sure everyone, customers and colleagues are safe and accounted for. Be prepared for power cuts and loss of services. Stay in a high place with a means of escape. Be ready should you need to evacuate from the building or area. Co-operate with the emergency services and call 999 if you are in immediate danger. Call Floodline on 0845 988 1188 using quickdial 114171 for up-to-date flooding information. The Environment Agency website contains details of river level and flooding information and can be accessed at [www.environment-agency.gov.uk](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk).

The initial warning gave over 26 hours notice; the second, and severe flood warning, gave over 14 hours notice.

#### **Flood Warden Team Response:**

The warnings applied to the east quay, the main quay, Freeman Street, and properties leading off all three sectors. It was a lovely winter's day, the wind had dropped but the biggest surge recorded was on its way. Perhaps because the sun was shining, perhaps because fortuitously the flooding had been less serious following previous messages, whatever - there were those who expressed incredulity. This made the role of the Wardens more important – and more difficult.

We have a team of just twenty volunteers yet Wells has more properties at risk of flooding than anywhere else between Kings Lynn and Great Yarmouth with seven complex at-risk sectors. Since the initial warnings pertained to just three of the sectors all Wardens could be directed to these sectors. With short breaks they were all on duty from 9.00 a.m. until after 8.00 p.m. on the 5<sup>th</sup> carrying out their task of warning and informing residents at risk of flooding and, since this was a severe flood warning, of the recommendation to evacuate. Repeat visits were made when necessary to ensure as many residents as possible were informed; Wardens in the control centre carefully recorded who might need assistance in evacuating and further essential information if later rescues were needed. An all out effort was made to ensure residential properties registered for warnings along the northern edge of the town – the East Quay, main Quay, Freeman Street and eight lanes and yards - were warned and informed of the coming flood and given advice as to evacuation.

The prescribed duty of the Flood Wardens is to warn and inform *residents* notified by the EA as at risk of flooding, as opposed to businesses and non-residents. Nor does the team does have the capacity or authority to assist with protecting property and we have all signed an NNDC document to this effect. That said, our team exceeded their duty and warned and informed all the shops on the main quay and wherever possible, in

person or by 'phone, non-residents of properties in the three sectors. Additionally whilst we were aware that some of the Wardens, when taking a break, spent time with some of the more vulnerable residents who had not evacuated we knew where they were if needed. So all our Wardens were on standby when at 5.00 p.m. we received an EA message that the rest of the town was at risk of flooding by 8.07 p.m. A check of the EA website revealed Wells was completely blue. It was exceptional to receive such a message only three hours before high tide. We then began to receive calls from residents in the other four sectors who had received the message asking whether they needed to evacuate.

To add to the situation mobile 'phone contact with the police had gone down and the retained fire crew had returned to their station since the warning for further flooding included the station. To tackle such a potentially dangerous situation it was, and will be, essential for us to be able to gather the Wardens together as swiftly as possible if back-up warning and informing is needed and potentially a swift move into evacuation mode. When I eventually made direct contact with the senior duty officer at the Environment Agency I was reassured that, whilst at risk, those sectors were not expected to be flooded that evening. However, whilst Wardens then visited or called some of the distressed residents who had received the late warning, we still needed to know the team was available until high tide had passed.

#### **Friday 6 December and the end of this flood episode:**

1.15/1.33 a.m. the Severe Flood Warning for the morning tide of the 6<sup>th</sup> was downgraded to a warning for high tide at 8.41 a.m.

5.01 a.m. a Flood Warning was issued for high tide at 8.50 p.m. Whilst moderately less concerned we and the team remained on alert until the evening. Several Wardens delayed going on holiday and/or sought unpaid leave during the two days.

#### **The next surge, and the ones after that:**

When you read this hopefully the high spring tides of 2<sup>nd</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> of this month will have passed without incident but we need to be aware that we are now in the months which historically have seen major incidents. The last day of January and the first few days of February will bring the next spring tides to watch for with levels rising from over 3 metres AODN on the 31<sup>st</sup> January.

Please check if you are in an at-risk sector and if not already, register for EA warnings and organise protection. Also check if you have vulnerable relatives and friends similarly positioned and if you live far away make contact with neighbours to help with flood protection or care during an emergency. Go to the Wells Town Council Website (if neither you or your family have access to a computer ask the very helpful staff in the library); click on to the heading 'Flood Advice' you will find information for residents and separately for businesses – including contact details for the Environment Agency. We have forwarded up to date information to the Town Clerk and asked him to add to the website. The Wardens have asked us to emphasise that we do not hold stocks of sand bags and if available we do not have the capacity to handle them.

#### **Thanks:**

I have written to the Chief Constable giving thanks for the Police support and to Deputy Chief Fire Officer regarding the offer of assistance from our retained fire fighters. Our thanks also go to many people including those who kept near their 'phones in case required, some of whom we have listed below. Please accept our thanks to anyone we may have missed out:

Maltings staff for invaluable use of their cabin and 'phones  
Alderman Peel High School Headteacher and staff for preparing for evacuees  
Pinewood & Holkham Estate for conferring on evacuation of Pinewoods and closure of Beach Road  
Wells Day Care Centre offering accommodation and to their Ambulance Drivers  
Additional volunteer drivers and helpers  
Owners of generators, heavy lifting gear  
RNLI preparing its rescue RHIB  
Sailing Club preparing its rescue boat  
Experienced boat owners on standby both east and west of the sliding barrier.