

Flooding in Harberton Parish on 17th September 2023

Public responses to digital survey

Following heavy rainfall between 16th - 18th September, several properties in both villages of Harberton and Harbertonford were affected by flooding, as were some of the roads.

To understand the extent of the flooding the Environment Agency and Devon County Council got in touch with the Parish Council to ask some questions about which properties and roads were most affected in order to better understand what happened. To get a full picture, the Parish Clerk opened up these questions to residents to share information and experiences.

The Parish Clerk took the opportunity to invite comment from residents about the kind of support that the community was able to give each other - what was helpful and what could have been useful if someone had thought about it before the event happened. Responses were sought to support thinking about whether there is anything that people living in the Parish could do to prepare themselves should a similar event happen in the future.

The online survey was circulated via social media groups used by residents in Harberton and Harbertonford, and a link included in the Harberton Village Circular.

16 residents responded to the survey. Of these:

- 9 responded as the resident or on behalf of a resident of a property that was flooded.
- 8 to comment on flooding of the highways and land around properties
- 2 responded to make suggestions for community preparedness for any future flooding events
- 11 responses shared information relating to experiences of flooding in Harberton
- 5 responses shared information relating to experiences of flooding in Harbertonford

The following **properties** were named by respondents as having been affected by the flooding:

Harbertonford

- Moreleigh Cottage, Harbertonford, TQ9 7TS
- 2 Harbourne Terrace, Harbertonford, TQ9 7TP
- 3 Harbourne Terrace, Harbertonford, TQ9 7TP

Harberton

- 3 St Clements, TQ9 7SN
- 4 St Clements terrace. My property was flooded with 6 inches of water on the ground floor....leaving 1 inch of silt on the ground floor.
- The Old Forge
- Town Farm Barn
- Orchard End, Harberton TQ9 7SN - One of the 2 modern houses at the end of the cul de sac at Town Farm. The property is one house away from where the deluge of water entered the village. There was minimal damage internally, but only because recent installation of sealed doors kept the water out. Mud lines on the doors show that the house would have flooded without these. There was extensive damage to the outside hardstanding around the property. 3 inches of mud deposited at the back of the house. The gravel driveway was largely washed away. I also co-own the private access road at Town Farm. The road bore the brunt of the water flow down towards St Clement's Terrace. Large amounts of straw and mud debris were left on the road. Drains have been filled with debris.

The following roads or areas of land were reported as having been affected by flooding:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where the A381 meets the Moreleigh Road in Harbertonford • Pear Tree House, Harbertonford - My driveway ponded (like I've never seen before) and the ditch in my garden filled (like it does in winter sometimes) but very minor. All drained by sunrise. • The Melbray, Harbertonford TQ9 7TS - water filled the garden and made it to the top step at the rear door but did not enter the property. The garden filled with mud and water. We now have an issue that the gravel in the garden is on concrete and has mud underneath it. This means that when it has subsequently rained the garden is a mud bath and the car gets stuck. I am not sure how we resolve this as the mud has nowhere to go. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 St Clement's Terrace My garden and sheds flooded with water/mud/straw to 1 meter deep. Leaving mud & straw 30cm deep. • I was driving out of the village west to east, from the bus stop area Towards the little bridge over the Harberton stream at The Old Forge, at 6.45 am on Sun.17 Sept. • Screw lane - between Belsford Mill Cross roads and Gills Cross • From evidence on the ground and first hand accounts on the ground all roads, lanes and paths experienced a large amount of excess water flooding down towards the village 'bottom' / Preston Barns area / Old Forge • Some signs of run off past my house, Manor Cottage TQ97SP, up the cricket pitch lane leading up from Vicarage Ball. The drain at the junction opposite Tristford Farm was packed with foot-thick silt afterwards, and the upper stretch of lane showed signs of scouring from high volumes of water. • Belsford service road at the bottom of the green lane
Properties were affected by flood waters at approximately:	
2am on Sunday 17 th September 2023.	Between 2- 3am on Sunday 17 th September

Please let us know any further information that you think would be relevant to share with Devon County Highways, Devon County Flood Team or the Environment Agency about the flooding event.	
<p>The culvert doesn't work. The road drains aren't big enough. I have videos of the road before, during and after the flash flood The drain at the front of the house was left blocked in the clean up by the environment agency</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a village floods it would be really helpful if YOU ALL turn up and offered your knowledge & support in dealing with it. I am shocked that we 100% relied on our own initiatives. We had to call you all day after day....I think you started to arrive on Tuesday & Wednesday....that is too late! • The flood waters were full of mud and straw indicating that there needs to be better catchment management. • The relevant authorities were on site immediately after the flood then everyone seemed to disappear which needs explaining as it did make me feel abandoned during the clear up • This was a mud/slurry slide not just a flood. • This road (Screw Lane) frequently floods and it's generally the community which sorts it out - new landowners have now attempted to keep bund holes clear to allow water to run across their land but with the mud/soil from the farmers fields being run off soo quickly it's easy for them to become quickly blocked. The farmer needs to address his run off management , the bind holes need to be kept clear frequently but that's a big job for one landowner taking all the farmers mud and hedgerows management which isn't their responsibility • I found the (Vicarage Ball) road thick with mud, and a car thrown sideways across the road, blocking it. I turned back, and went up near St.Clement's Terrace, where there was a lot of activity and mud. [A resident] told me about the flooding of [an elderly resident's] house and her rescue. I went home (1 Wesley Place) and found

	<p>there had been some slight seepage of rain- water under the front door due to the downpour of water down the hill from the corner drain (covered over with mud) from opposite Tristford Farm. [A resident] very kindly cleared the drain the next day. I went out and linked with [a resident] and family at 6 Wesley Place, whose ground floor was devastated. I brought them tea and toast. and talked with neighbours at No.3 and 4 Wesley Place. Later I brought [a resident] at St.Clement's Terrace some soup for lunch.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I work in the SWW Waste Water Network local department and I made specific observations to see if the sewer network flooded out. I saw no visual evidence the SWW combined sewer or EA watercourse + SWD flooded out of plotted Manholes. The flooding seemed to erupt from the watercourses themselves - this is backed up by visual evidence and reports from local residents. • Information or opinion? Austerity after 2010 took away our parish lengthsmen. Road and drain maintenance has been poor, especially as regards road sweeping and leaf removal in the autumn. • Flooding of Screw Lane has been common for a number of years especially since the withdrawal of Lengthsmen's services. The council has attempted to recruit replacement services but of course all other rural councils are doing likewise. Support for training new operatives would be most helpful from DCC • The green lane (Belsford) sits below a number of fields and has previously been worked on about 15 years ago by the council and lots of stone was dropped in it to make it useable but all that stone has been moved by flood water and blocked road causing it to flood
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What kind of support do you think that people in the community were able to provide that was useful, both during and after the flooding event?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neighbours helped each other to clean up their flooded houses. • Local help • After the flood locals were very helpful in clearing the affected houses • There was no warning, no immediate support to evacuate residents. The environment agency were only concerned with the road and offered no help to home owners. There was no offer of support or accommodation from the council. There has been no information about what went wrong or why the new system failed us 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their time and energy in clearing mud. Which is very kind but really should not be the job of the community. • The community were the main support during and post flooding. They were clearing roads and drains, feeding affected residents and assisting with clear up for private residences • I was on holiday when it happened and got back a week later. Was informed about it the day it happened by someone in the village. • Muscle and spiret [sic] • Local community were great not sure who cleared Screw lane eventually but they cleared the mud from the road but blocked em the drainage holes with that clearing so it flooded again days later - lack of local knowledge/sense in that case • Tea and sharing about the impact of the mud visiting front doors. • Local people provided the majority of physical, mechanical and emotional support in the very early stages • SHDC supplied sandbags after a couple of days, supplementing community-held stock. The Environment Agency also attended with an emergency team and a land management (?) team whom I met and interacted with. Villagers helped each other with emergency clean up, offers of equipment and accommodation. I've heard that
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	<p>an intended village emergency plan was 'parked' a while ago, but would an alert system have been any more effective?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was heart warming to see the response of neighbours and the local farming community to quickly come to the aid of villagers. • (Belsford) We were blocked in - road was flooded and covered with water stone and debris from the green lane - luckily local resident had mini digger and moved all the debris to the side of the road so we could get out in our cars - it's now in a pile at the end of the green lane effectively blocking that as the green lane itself is now also trench line as the water course has eroded a channel Down it.
<p>Is there anything else that could have been useful to help prepare for flooding, or help clean up afterwards? How might the community be better prepared in the future?</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obviously a better water route for the culvert. A warning system that actually is operational. The council could actually spend time cleaning away the silt from the roads affected, so that residents don't have to constantly deal with this being tracked back into their homes once they have been cleaned. The highways could empty the drains, now full of silt, posing an even greater threat to future flooding • There needs to be proper flood defences. • The EA flood defences could have been working. Ie the culvert and the pump. • If the same was to happen this weekend we would have the same result. What is the plan for this? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urgent investigation and remedial action is required to manage the run off of water from the fields above Screw Lane in Harberton. Measures are needed to disseminate and delay the water so that it does not flow down into the village in one avalanche. The methods of farming these fields must be managed to prevent further flooding especially as climate change will only see increases in incidences of high sudden rainfall. • The farmer who ploughed his fields should not be allowed to use all those fields in that way. It's too dangerous for the settlement to have 60acres sloping towards the village with no protection. But the thing that would have helped the most is if the lane (screw lane?) had the drainage issues sorted out years ago. It continually floods. • We received absolutely no warning, I'm signed up to EA flood alerts which didn't send any kind of warning. I hope the local drainage assets are being regularly maintained, I personally saw no evidence of this leading up to the flooding. Could the council adopt the private drainage assets to ensure they are regularly maintained. • The authorities arrived very late post event, we need skips and regular bin collections to get rid of damaged goods and garden waste. • Future preparedness could be improved by installing flood resilient doors and floors in the affected properties - it would be great to receive some financial assistance with this • Again, was on holiday whilst it happened, so not sure what else could have been done. But i have been messaged by a few people who have my number as only recently moved in and everyones been v kind. • Not allowing high up fields to be cultivated. They should only be pasture. Need a bylaw. • Local knowledge of the drainage holes so they weren't blocked when clearing the road itself - better management of farmers run off - regularly clearing of water course but the rain came so early in the season no one was prepared for it • Sand bags available throughout the year.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the flooding risk remained there appeared to be zero support for further support such as sand bags, council support, action plans in place. Council support was minimal and late. Support for rehousing, mechanical support, etc Locals report this event happened 14 years ago so there is talk that no lessons were learnt. • Maintained buddleholes and drains, anticipation of run off from large fields above the village, better crop and land management. • The first I knew of the flooding was when a mud statue knocked on my door who turned out to be the PC clerk on the hunt for Aqua-sac's. One thing the PC could do is understand the need for more of these to be distributed to villagers and perhaps the community fund could be used to pay for them. • If the flow of water down the green lane also know as Watery Lane has been better managed over the years it might not have been so bad but this was extreme and sometimes you can't predict extremes and it was made worse by the fields having been harvested - not the farmers fault just bad timing - different issue at Screw lane where the mud from the recently harvested fields did cause issues and frequently does as there the farmer doesn't take steps to prevent the frequent mud slides into the road after rain
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Is there anything else you'd like to say?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why was the EA camera and warning system not activated on the culvert? Why has the council not installed proper drainage systems that can cope with these conditions? Why has no one from the council come to clean up the road silt, mud and branches? We as residents have missed work time to do this. What on earth are we paying the council and government bodies for if they don't do their jobs! • For two years we've had work at the back of our property, been inconvenienced by road closure. A bus has hit our garden wall due to the road works and a lorry hit our house. I would like an explanation of what work has been done, what it should have done and why it failed. I would like to know what the plan is from all agencies to avoid a repeat incident. I would like to know from each agency what their statutory duties are for these incidents and what their response was. • When I heard the rain and saw the puddles in the night - I checked the gov website (https://check-for-flooding.service.gov.uk/) and it said no flood warnings, so I went back to bed. I hope the poor people in Harbourne Terrace do not rely on this resource. Seems strange that it would not even say "flooding is possible", even while several houses were under water. Maybe it only covers predictions of river levels (the Harbourne, which is at the end of my garden, was not exceptionally high, throughout) and it was incoming streams problematic in this case, which it does not cover? Would be good to understand this better. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am shocked in your slow and insufficient responses. I hope moving forward this changes. • I hope there are lessons learnt from this, including better catchment management and more regular drainage surveys/clearance. I understand that a large amount of rainfall fell in a short period however the mud and straw absolutely played a role in making this event worse. • Learn from past mistake. Previous flood that affected the upper part of the village was caused by cultivation of a pasture field. • The community were great we never saw a council person - we've reported the fact that the pothole repairs repeatedly done on the Belsford service road where literally washed out of their potholes so we now have craters in the road which are a hazard and have been reported but still not seen anyone. Thank god for self help • I am concerned about the emotional / psychological impact on the residents who had downstairs covered in muddy water, and will have to move out as a result while things dry and get cleaned. Some of the residents are into their seventies, eighties and nineties - and their security has been shaken and we all have suffered the trauma of the landslide-flood. If there could be some forum/Zoom/ for people to share their experiences and give support to each other face to face, maybe with a counsellor present and guiding - that would be good, for bringing people back together again.
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