

AYLESBURY VALE DISTRICT COUNCIL

POLICY STATEMENT ON FLOOD DEFENCE

July 2003

1. INTRODUCTION

Purpose

1.1 This policy statement has been prepared by Aylesbury Vale District Council to provide a public statement of the Council's approach to flood defence in its area.

Background

1.2 The Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has policy responsibility for flood and coastal defence in England. However, delivery is the responsibility of a number of flood and coastal defence "operating authorities" i.e. the Environment Agency, local authorities and Internal Drainage Boards. Responsibilities differ according to the type of operating authority and Aylesbury Vale District Council's responsibilities are set out in paragraphs 3.1 and 3.2 below.

1.3 The Government has published a policy aim and three objectives for flood and coastal defence¹. To ensure a more certain delivery of the aim and objectives by the individual operating authorities the Government has published a series of high level targets². The first target requires each operating authority to publish a policy statement setting out their plans for delivering the Government's policy aim and objectives in their area. This will include their assessment of flooding and coastal erosion risk in their area, and the plans for reducing or managing that risk.

1.4 This policy statement fulfils that requirement. Copies are available from the Council's offices at 4, Great Western Street, Aylesbury Bucks HP20 2TW and on the Internet at www.AylesburyValeDC.gov.uk. We are also providing a copy to:

- the Department of the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA);
- the Environment Agency and
- the Buckingham and River Ouzel Internal Drainage Board

2. HOW THE COUNCIL WILL DELIVER THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY AIM AND OBJECTIVES

2.1 Aylesbury Vale District Council acknowledges and supports the Government's aim and objectives for flood and coastal defence (as set out below). As an inland authority our policy and approach will be consistent with them, as follows:

2.2 **Government's policy aim: To reduce the risk to people and the developed and natural environment from flooding by encouraging the provision of technically, environmentally and economically sound and sustainable defence measures.**

2.2.1 Section 3 below sets out our plans for reducing or managing the risk of flooding in the Council's area.

2.3 Objective(a): To encourage the provision of adequate and cost effective flood warning systems.

2.3.1 Provision of flood warning systems is the responsibility of the Environment Agency. However, Aylesbury Vale District Council recognises its related and important role in emergency planning and response. We will therefore:

- ensure that our emergency response plans include appropriate arrangements for flooding emergencies and that such plans are reviewed, in consultation with the Environment Agency, at least every two years.
- maintain an awareness of the Environment Agency's flood warning dissemination plan for our area and contribute to its implementation as necessary; and
- play an agreed role in any flood warning emergency exercises organised by the Environment Agency covering our area.

2.4 Objective(b): To encourage the provision of adequate, economically, technically and environmentally sound and sustainable flood measures.

2.4.1 Aylesbury Vale District Council will:

- (i) provide an adequate, economically, technically and environmentally sound approach to providing the flood defence service. We will:
 - a) adopt a strategic approach to provision of flood defences, particularly by ensuring the assessment of any wider, potential effects of proposed defences. To this end we will continue to play a full role in Local Contributions Plans for our area;
 - b) aim to ensure that any flood defences provided are sustainable and provide social and/or economic benefits to people whilst taking account of natural processes and which avoid committing future generations to inappropriate defence options;
 - c) ensure work is carried out in accordance with best practice and to deliver best value for money including:
 - keeping up-to-date with policy and technical developments in flood defence, in particular by reference to Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) guidance, other Government publications and relevant technical manuals;
 - consulting the Environment Agency on flood defence options to ensure that best practice is adopted and shared; and
 - using appropriately qualified experts to advise on analysis, design & appearance of works or programmes of management;
 - d) where the authority is promoting flood defences it will consider alternative approaches to funding such as contributions from developers or other direct beneficiaries of works, in accordance with Planning Policy Guidance Note 25.
 - e) ensure that appropriate maintenance regimes are in place for flood defences for which the Council takes responsibility;
 - f) inform landowners of what responsibilities for maintenance rest with them (see paragraph 3.1.1 below);
 - g) make publicly available the Council's expenditure plans for flood defence maintenance and any capital works through our Best Value local performance indicators giving current year budget & estimate and following years budget.
- (ii) play a positive role in fulfilling our statutory and other responsibilities for furthering nature conservation, including achievement of the Government's environmental obligations and targets. In particular we will:

- a) fulfil our responsibilities in relation to nationally and internationally important conservation areas, under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and as a competent authority under the terms of the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994 (NB this applies equally to EA, local authorities and IDBs);
- b) when flood defence works are carried out, by ourselves or others, seek opportunities for environmental enhancement, aim to avoid damage to environmental interests and to ensure no net loss to habitats covered by Biodiversity Action Plans. We will monitor all losses and gains of such habitats as a result of these operations and report on them annually to the Environment Agency.
- c) co-operate as necessary with English Nature, Dacorum BC and the Environment Agency in the completion of Water Level Management Plans for the Tringford & Wilstone reservoirs.

2.5 Objective c): To discourage inappropriate development in areas at risk from flooding.

- 2.5.1 As the local planning authority for our area, Aylesbury Vale District Council will take account of flooding and erosion risks in all matters relating to the formulation of planning policies and deciding individual planning applications, in accordance with Planning Policy Guidance Note 25 and advice received from the Environment Agency.
- 2.5.2 The Council is also developing a more proactive approach to addressing the issues of identifying small works to minor watercourses, all of which need consent in one form or another. These consents might include planning permission or building regulations approval in addition to land drainage consent from the Environment Agency.

3.0 OUR ASSESSMENT OF THE RISK OF FLOODING IN OUR AREA AND WHAT WE WILL DO TO REDUCE OR MANAGE THAT RISK

3.1 Flood defence responsibilities

- 3.1.1 Apart from certain obligations to protect internationally important habitats under the EU Habitats Directive, all flood defence works are undertaken under permissive powers. *This means that operating authorities, such as Aylesbury Vale District Council, are not legally obliged to carry out flood defence works.* It is also important to note that the Council does not normally accept responsibility for maintenance of watercourses or flood defences on private land; this is the responsibility of the landowner.
- 3.1.2 Aylesbury Vale District Council is the relevant operating authority for flood defences on ordinary watercourses which are not within the area of an internal drainage board. We are creating a register of the flood defences that are owned or managed by the Council, others that exist on ordinary watercourses and will identify those considered critical by the Environment Agency.
- 3.1.3 The Environment Agency is the relevant operating authority for flood defences on designated main rivers. Culverts under roads are generally the responsibility of the relevant Highways Authority (Buckinghamshire County Council generally or Highways Agency for the A41 trunk road at Aston Clinton).

3.2 **Assessment of flood risk**

- 3.2.1 There are 61km of ordinary watercourses within urban areas for which Aylesbury Vale District Council is the relevant operating authority. There are significant further lengths across the rural areas. These are all of the watercourses in the Council's area except the main rivers, which are the responsibility of the Environment Agency, and the reaches covered by the Buckingham and River Ouzel Internal Drainage Board.
- 3.2.2 Based on historical flooding information, the Council have carried out a basic assessment of the risk of flooding from the ordinary watercourses in our area. There appear to be very few, if any, which pose a significant threat to a large number of properties. This will be coupled with the Environment Agency's indicative flood plain maps for future re-assessment.
- 3.2.3 "Critical ordinary watercourses" are watercourses which, although not classified as "main river", have been identified by the Environment Agency as having the potential to put at risk from flooding large numbers of people and properties. The Environment Agency have identified a single length of 880m of watercourse within the Council's area which may be "critical". This unnamed watercourse runs between Bryants Acre and Halton Lane in Wendover.
- 3.2.4 The main areas at risk of flooding are the centre of Buckingham and a number of small groups of properties or isolated houses. The Environment Agency is currently designing a flood alleviation scheme for Buckingham which was originally scheduled to be constructed during 2003 but has been delayed.
- 3.2.5 The other properties which have flooded in the past have usually done so as a result of minor watercourses over-topping their banks or from overland flows following extreme rainfall on a wetted catchment.
- 3.2.6 The Council is satisfied that there are minimal risks to human life created by these flood risks from ordinary watercourses, but emphasises the need for the Environment Agency's flood warnings to be heeded, where these are provided (see below).

3.3 **Action to reduce or manage flood risks**

- 3.3.1 The main means by which flood risks will be managed is through the Environment Agency's flood warning dissemination plan of September 2000. This makes arrangements for warning to be provided within this Council's area, including individual warnings to high risk properties.
- 3.3.2 Warnings are issued for:-
- River Thames catchment –Aston Clinton to Aylesbury (Bear Brook), Long Marston to Thames, Thames to Dorchester.
 - River Ray catchment – Shipton Lee to Islip
 - River Great Ouse catchment (Buckingham) – Brackley to Thornborough (including Steeple Claydon), Thornborough to Newport Pagnell,
 - River Ouzel catchment – Leighton Buzzard to Newport Pagnell
- 3.3.3 The Engineering Section call on the Housing Maintenance operatives to deal with minor flooding incidents and have produced an Operational Flood Plan. The Council's Emergency Plan contains provision for dealing with the effects of major flooding (evacuation, temporary accommodation, etc) and there are arrangements for cascading warnings received from the Environment Agency to relevant Council services.

- 3.3.4 The Council is developing a programme to inspect the state of:
- Flood defences owned by the Council on all ordinary watercourses; and
 - All critical ordinary watercourses and related culverts.
- 3.3.5 The Council recognises that there may be other, privately owned, flood defences which would benefit from inspection. However, at present the Council does not have the resources to carry out these inspections.
- 3.3.6 The Council will ensure that regular maintenance is carried out on the flood defences and channels which we own, or for which we accept responsibility, so that they operate at optimum efficiency. Where the responsibility for maintenance rests with a landowner, we will aim to secure co-operation ensuring appropriate maintenance takes place, drawing on enforcement powers if necessary. Where the responsibility for maintenance rests with the Environment Agency we will pass on any information we gather regarding maintenance or operational issues.
- 3.3.7 By following Government guidance in Planning Policy Guidance Note 25 on development in flood risk areas, the Council, acting as a local planning authority, will aim to ensure that risks are further minimised. This includes measures for encouraging sustainable urban drainage systems to control surface water run off.

4. PARTNERSHIPS AND REVIEW OF THIS POLICY STATEMENT

- 4.1 The Council has set out its policy and approach to flood defence. We recognise the need to work in partnership with central Government and other operating authorities and participate in the local Flood Defence Liaison Group with the County Council, Environment Agency, Buckingham & River Ouzel Internal Drainage Board and Bucks Fire & Rescue. Our local population also has an important part to play, in recognising the vital importance of watercourses in controlling flood risk and the need to avoid blockages, whether by dumping rubbish or obstructing flows in other ways. We ask members of the public to let us know of any problems which might increase the risk of flooding or erosion.
- 4.2 Aylesbury Vale District Council intends to review this policy statement in three years' time, when it will be revised and reissued as necessary. Meanwhile, the Council welcomes any comments on the approach and policies set out in this statement.

References

¹Strategy for Flood and Coastal Defence in England and Wales MAFF and Welsh Office, September 1993

²High Level Targets for Flood and Coastal Defence Operating Authorities and Elaboration of the Environment Agency's Flood Defence Supervisory Duty MAFF, November 1999

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