

Brilliance in resistance

23 March 2017

Robbie Craig reports on the work of a team behind a new plan to protect properties from flooding

The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has published [The Flood Property Resilience Action Plan](#), setting out steps that could encourage wider use of property flood resilience.

The plan was the culmination of a year's work by a roundtable team of professionals from the insurance, surveying, charity and construction sectors, led by Dr Peter Bonfield of the Building Research Establishment. DEFRA and Environment Agency officials supported the work but left the development of the action plan to members of the roundtable team.

Common hazard

Flooding is the most common and widespread natural hazard in the UK, with almost 1 in 6 homes at risk. Although the government is investing £2.3bn to protect a further 300,000 homes by 2021 using defences at the community level, there will still be properties at risk in places where it is difficult or uneconomic to build defences, or in locations where the particular risk means that these approaches will not work.

Property-level resilience can play a valuable role in managing the impacts and disruption that flooding causes and offer people more control and confidence in managing their own risk. It includes a wide range of measures, and although traditionally it has meant physical installations such as flood barriers or airbrick covers to block apertures, it is increasingly about adapting the building through use of flood-resilient materials or design to minimise the damage if water does get inside.

According to DEFRA, property-level resilience has a cost-benefit ratio in excess of 5 for every £1 invested in terms of reduced damages. However, despite several government and local authority schemes installing these measures, there is still relatively low uptake in England – people at high risk of flood are not routinely installing resilience measures in their homes and businesses. This is the challenge to which ministers asked the roundtable team to respond.

There are 2 immediate outputs from the team's work. First, [a website has been set up](#) by the Centre for Resilience to make it easier for public and professionals alike to access information about flood resilience.

Second, the [Business Emergency Resilience Group](#) has piloted an end-to-end advice service to help people affected by the winter floods of 2015/16 in the north of England.

Long-term project

However, the property-level resilience action plan is a long-term project and the team would like to see the following developments at key stages:

- **after a year:** a better understanding of what property-level resilience is among individuals, communities and businesses;
- **after 2 years:** significant progress towards systems and practices in the insurance, building and finance sectors that normalise property-level resilience as part of existing activity;
- **after 3 to 5 years:** a situation where those at high risk of flood have the knowledge, capability and means to adapt their properties in ways that limit the physical damage to homes and businesses from flooding, speeding up their recovery
- **after 5 years:** a situation in which it is standard practice for properties at high risk of flood to have been made resilient.

Bonfield has now stepped down as chairman of the roundtable team and his place taken by Graham Brogden, a member of its Business Emergency Resilience Group. Brogden will lead work to improve both standards for products and services, and the way that business helps customers with flood resilience. The immediate ambition is that membership of the team will expand from the core group and actions rolled out across the sector.

Recent [DEFRA-funded research](#) looked into the specialist requirements for providing technical advice on flood resilience, and one effective route identified was to find a way to add flooding competencies to built environment professionals' skill set rather than create a niche profession. How this might be achieved and what skills and training would be needed were not mapped out in great detail. However, the roundtable team's continuing work on standards for services and products may offer a chance to explore and initiate this.

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Further information

This feature is taken from the RICS *Building control journal* (February/March 2017).