

Reflections on the Summer Floods

After a very worrying week in July, thankfully the summer floods did not really have a severe effect in Caversham but it is worth reflecting on this event.

In mid July, the Environment Agency efficiently notified those people in this area, whose homes were at risk of flooding and who had not responded to previous invitations, to receive the Environment Agency's 'Flood Warnings Direct' by telephone, that they were running a trial to sign people up automatically for this service. A week later, a recorded message was sent out by phone, notifying of a flood warning and telling people that they should get themselves, their family, their pets and their valuables to a place of safety.

In the light of the flash floods which had occurred upstream in the areas served by the tributaries of the Thames, the water would inevitably channel down the Thames to us. The day and night updates on Radio Berkshire and the Environment Agency's radio reports and telephone hotline kept us informed as the water worked its way down towards us. The efficiency of the Council in delivering sand bags demonstrated its concern and quick action, in contrast to its refusal in previous years to provide sand bags to

anyone but Council tenants, but added to the increasing panic of some residents. I understand that both the Council and Rob Wilson, MP also delivered advisory leaflets but these did not reach those who had already lost their dry access!

Some of us, aware that the river, though flooding very fast, was starting at the low summer level and that the Thameside meadows were still dry, in contrast to winter flood times when they would have already been saturated and had standing water, reasoned that a lot of water would be absorbed by the meadows and open spaces upstream from Caversham Bridge – the Thames Promenade, the Reading Festival site, Chazey Farm, the Mapledurham Estate. In the event, that was the case and the worst effect of the floods in Caversham was the anxiety caused.

However, we should not be complacent and should be grateful to the Environment Agency, Radio Berkshire and Reading Borough Council. If similar circumstances were to occur in winter, it could be a very different story, particularly if more building, paving and road building on our flood plane were to reduce this saving grace.