

Written Questions Received from Various Sources together with Answers

Topic	Agency	Question	Asked by	Resident from	Initial Response	Further Actions Required	Full Response
Cleaning	KCC	Are the KCC going to introduce a cleaning regime for the drains to improve flow & capacity?	Tracey Salter	Tonbridge	KCC clean drains on a cyclical basis. We are currently reviewing the way we do this and this review will be informed by the recent events. Some of our drains flow into the Southern Water sewer i.e. we own the road drain and they own the main pipe in the road - we will need to look at this jointly.		
Communication	EA	In 2000, EA staff visited properties in Hildenborough stating (accurately, within the hour) when the water level would peak. Why was this information not available either in person, by phone, or online in 2013?	Paul Bird	Hildenborough		We have changed the way warnings are issued. We have moved to daylight hours and are sending the anticipated list of warnings to Silver Control who will then resource house to house back up of warnings where possible. The warning system is for the river flooding, for example the Medway or Bourne and not for surface water or foul flooding.	
Communication	EA	Why did the EA tell us over the phone twice on Christmas Eve that the amount of water in our road would not get any higher, yet by early evening we were up to our knees in flood water?	Tracey Salter	Tonbridge	Please tell us how you came by the information, if you have a call reference we will chase it up and see why it happened and prevent it from happening again.		
Drainage	KCC Highways	Why the drains were blocked in Holdford Street and Danvers Road, which is why the initial flooding happened?	Trudi Giles	Tonbridge	The drains on Holford Street and Danvers Road were all cleaned in May 2013 and found to be flowing well. We had not had any reports of blocked drains or flooding since and therefore additional cleansing was not carried out.		
Drainage	KCC Highways	What is the council proposing to do to improve the surface water drainage to prevent it backing up?	Tracey Salter	Tonbridge	Drainage repairs and improvements are assessed to determine the risk to highway safety and the risk to private property. Schemes are then delivered on the basis of highest risk first - sites in Tonbridge and Malling will be assessed and considered along with all other sites identified across the county		
Dredging	EA	When was the Tonbridge section of the river last dredged and are there any plans to dredge in the future?	Carl Lewis	Tonbridge	We have been carrying out some dredging this year on the river medway and were programed to be someway to tonbridge but our works have been interrupted by the weather. In the main desilting works are done for navigation purposes rather than flood management purposes. An annual inspection is scheduled, but may be delayed by the flooding.		
Early Warnings	EA	What early warning system can be set up?	Carl Lewis	Tonbridge	The Environment Agency already offer a free flood warning service. We aim to offer at least two hours notice before the first property flood but in practice usually give more. You can sign up online or by calling 01732223257. The warning system is for the river flooding, for example the Medway or Bourne and not for surface water or foul flooding. See also house to house visits.		

Emergency services	Emergency Services	Why there wasn't an emergency service representative sent down Leybank on Christmas Eve, even though an evacuation service was being offered?	Rachel Murray	Hildenborough				KCC provided a coach to evacuate residents from Hildenborough and Tonbridge. TMBC had staff out in Tonbridge, East Peckham and Hildenborough to liaise with residents and provide advice on the emergency rest centre arrangements.
Financial Future	KCC/TMBC	What is the financial future for Tonbridge, both residents and businesses? Why would anyone invest in houses or businesses here post flood? What infrastructure is proposed to stop this happening again?	Caroline Stevens	Tonbridge				Clearly there is a need to enhance the flood protection for Tonbridge and Sir John Stanley MP has assured residents that he would actively and strongly seek increased funding and approval for additional flood protection measures. TMBC has undertaken to do the following: a) Lobby at National level for improved flood defences in Tonbridge, and participate in discussions. b) Bid to be made through the Kent Growth Strategy Document to the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) for funding for improved flood defence in
Flood Storage Area	EA	I would like to know why the levy was already full to capacity the night of 23/24 December, and why so much water was released on 24 December, causing homes to flood? Also how could the same issue be prevented in future?	Laura Bayley	Tonbridge	This is not true. We didn't start to store water till Tuesday morning 24th December.			
Flood Storage Area	EA	If the problem was that the barrier reached capacity, can its capacity be increased? In light of recent events, would the money earmarked for strengthening the barrier be better spent on increasing capacity?	Paul Bird	Hildenborough	Before the flooding we had plans in place to increase the capacity of the structure.	In the short term we will seek the permission of the inspecting engineer to use some more of the space in the reservoir, if allowed this could increase capacity by 15%		We will see if the scheme from the middle medway strategy to increase the capacity of the reservoir by a total of 30% can be brought forward
Flood Storage Area	EA	Why was water released from the Leigh Barrier at such a high rate and could more have been released sooner to prevent this?	Paul Bird	Hildenborough	We have explained how the flood storage area was used, this was not the case.			
Flood Storage Area	EA	I think it would help most people if the EA were asked to explain in simple language exactly how the flood barrier works and why it was built in the first place. Most people seem to not understand that the flood barrier NEVER actually closes, there is always water being released. The three sluice gates move to control the flow. The EA also have to 'think ahead' as to when water released at Leigh will reach Allington and what the tidal section of the Medway will be doing. I do believe if this and other aspects of the workings of the barrier are explained many of the questions raised would be answered in one go.	Nick Johnston	Tonbridge	hopefully we have done this			
Flood Storage Area	EA	Who was directly in charge of the flood barrier over the Christmas period?	Carl Lewis	Tonbridge	Trained operators, using set procedures. Monitored by an external inspecting engineer and overseen by a clear management chain.			
Flood Storage Area	EA	Why were we not informed that the barrier was going to be opened on Christmas Eve?	Tracey Salter	Tonbridge	Warnings were issued, hopefully now that the way in which the structure is operated has been explained residents will realise that the structure halved the flow of the Medway in Tonbridge			
Flood Storage Area	EA	Is there any truth to the rumour that the barrier was opened for too long and too much water was released in one go?	Tracey Salter	Tonbridge	No			
Flood Storage Area	EA	Is there any truth in the rumour that the EA held back water for 5 days before releasing it on Christmas Eve, if so, why?	Tracey Salter	Tonbridge	No			
Flood Storage Area	EA	Why was Christmas Eve so exceptional after 41 years when our house never flooded...and hasn't since despite further heavy rain and saturated ground?	Caroline Stevens	Tonbridge	We hope that this question has been answered in the presentation at the public meetings. This was the highest recorded flow ever on the Upper Medway.			
Flood Wardens	EA	What help can we get to set up a flood warden group/team? What equipment can be provided by authorities and what training is available?	Carl Lewis	Tonbridge	Yes we would like to support KCC in providing information for a flood warden service			

Flood warnings	EA	In 2000 a severe flood warning was issued, when a lower rate of water was released from the Leigh Barrier than in 2013. Why then was a severe flood warning not issued in 2013?	Paul Bird	Hildenborough	The criteria for a severe flood warning were not met.	In light of a conversation with one resident who lives near Pizza Express we have revised down the severe threshold.	
Flood warnings	EA	Will there be a review into the best means of warning relevant publics about the opening of the Leigh flood barrier, in times of flood? The current emphasis in relation to flood information seems to be on the individual and for individual responsibility and pro-activity [registering with the EA]. In a few years time, this need for pro-activity will ebb from public consciousness, particularly as new people come into the area. [possible ideas: sirens in relevant areas; public information broadcasts, cutting into radio/television programming...]	John Cockram	Wateringbury (attending Tonbridge meeting)		After any incident we carry out a review, the aim is to learn lessons, improve procedures, exercise them and put them into practice. We have an agreement with BT that they will provide us with phone numbers of individuals who live on the floodplain. We also have publicity campaigns to raise awareness	
Flood warnings	EA	The EA website does not identify Hawden close as being in a high flood risk area, confirmed by the fact that it doesn't allow the set up of the automated flood warning alert system. We would suggest that mismanagement of the Leigh flood barrier led to this one off flooding of properties in the street. How would the EA respond to this?	Jo and Ian Wallace	Hildenborough	There was a flood warning service for Hildenborough in 2000. As the community floods from so many different sources we were able to offer a service for sday foul water flooding. At the Parishes request we withdrew the service	A service will be offered for the River Medway in Hildenborough, with the proviso that we cant warn of flooding from all sources	
Floodline Warnings Direct	EA	I would like to know why Floodline Warnings Direct didn't know we were flooded even though a number of residents reported it we were still on alert?	Rachel Murrary	Hildenborough	Please provide information as to the exact time of your call and if possible the call reference and we will follow this up	There have been a number of cases where the performance of floodline operators has not been satisfactory. We will put measures in place to improve this service	
Flood Warnings Direct	EA	Why did the EA website still state only a "flood alert" all day for Christmas Eve for the Hawden Close postcode even as the water was entering our properties?	Jo and Ian Wallace	Hildenborough	There was a flood warning service for Hildenborough in 2000. As the community floods from so many different sources we were able to offer a service for sday foul water flooding. At the Parishes request we withdrew the service	A service will be offered for the River Medway in Hildenborough, with the proviso that we cant warn of flooding from all sources	
Flood Warnings Direct	EA	Why did the residents of Hawden Close have no communication from the EA on Christmas Eve, either in person or by telephone to warn us that we were at risk of flooding?	Jo and Ian Wallace	Hildenborough	There was a flood warning service for Hildenborough in 2000. As the community floods from so many different sources we were able to offer a service for say foul water flooding. At the Parishes request we withdrew the service. Flood ambassadors were sent	We will improve the training offered to flood ambassadors. In future events a local bronze control will be established at Tonbridge castle to coordinate multiagency response and activities such as this	
Formal investigation	EA	Will an independent body [of informed experts in the field] be put in place to arbitrate, on behalf of the wider public, in disputes about EA activity and flood management? [In the same way ombudsman arbitrate in the financial sector.] At the moment, many people's perception, for good or ill, is that the EA is a government 'Quango' and cannot be 'held to account' for its actions.	John Cockram	Wateringbury (attending Tonbridge meeting)	This is a question to ask of the minister. This quango employee is sure that such an investigation will take place, see stage 6 review above		
Formal investigation	All	Will there be a formal investigation into what went wrong on Christmas Eve, considering we were not in a known flood risk area, to ensure that if an authority is responsible for mismanagement of the situation that they are held accountable?	Jo and Ian Wallace	Hildenborough	see above		
The future	EA/SWS	Why did it flood and is it likely to happen again or have lessons been learnt?	Rachel Murrary	Hildenborough	I hope this question has been answered in the presentation. If not, it rained hard, the flow of the medway was halved but still there were flooding problems.	Causes of flooding will be investigated, in the short term some infrastructure will need to be repaired.	In the long term we will do our utmost to seek investment in improved flood management structures
The future	EA	How are the authorities going to make sure this won't happen again to both residential and business premises?	Tracey Salter	Tonbridge		Causes of flooding will be investigated, in the short term some infrastructure will need to be repaired	In the long term we will do our utmost to seek investment in improved flood management structures. It must be remembered that in the long term nature finds a way of giving us a bigger flood than our defences are designed to manage
Insurance	EA	The newly flooded areas are likely to be blighted as far as getting house insurance goes. Is there any help or advice available for residents?	Caroline Stevens	Tonbridge	Yes please go to the website of the national flood forum http://nationalfloodforum.org.uk/	In the long run the government have been consulting on FloodRe a scheme to provide insurance for properties at risk of flooding	

New town development	TMBC	What steps are going to be taken by TMBC to prevent flooding at the new shopping, cinema and leisure development?	Carl Lewis	Tonbridge			When producing the Local Plan and deciding planning applications, including the redevelopment in the Town Centre, the Council takes in account the effect of development on flooding and how development would be affected by flooding. Individual proposals where flooding is likely to be an issue have to be accompanied by a Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) which must demonstrate how any flood risk can be mitigated for the development to proceed satisfactorily. The Council applies national Government policy and guidelines and does so in close consultation with the Environment Agency.
Official presence	KCC	Where exactly were KCC in Tonbridge and what date/time did they arrive?	Carl Lewis	Tonbridge	Our crews attended over 50 sites in Tonbridge and Malling between the 23rd and 25th December. In addition our Highway Stewards, Engineers and Out of Hours team were working throughout		
Official presence	All	Why was there an absence of EA or other authority officials during 23rd/24th December to monitor the rising water in Hawden Close and to provide advice?	Jo and Ian Wallace	Hildenborough	We had staff present in Hildenborough on 23rd and 24th		
Resources	TMBC	Why is the council wasting their time and resources placing sandbags around the bottom of parking meters?	Vivien Ambrose	Tonbridge			These were placed in two locations as a short-term measure following repairs needed after the earlier flooding.
Road closures	KCC Highways	Why were flooded roads not closed off earlier to prevent wash into houses?	Tracey Salter	Tonbridge	Between 23 Dec and Christmas Day KCC received over 2,000 highway enquiries, staff cancelled leave and worked very long hours. Due to the volume of enquiries and the impact of the weather, we had to prioritise strategic routes in the first instance and worked our way around the rest of the network as quickly as we could.	Following the recent floods we are looking at how we can work with parish councils, the EA and Flood Wardens to get emergency road closures implemented more quickly when flooding occurs	
Text alerts	EA	Why could a text, like the flood alert text, not have been sent to tell people when the flood barrier was going to be opened? It would have given people more chance to try and save items at home.	Nicky Crowston	Tonbridge	Firstly we have a flood warning service that disseminates texts warning of the possibility of flooding. In Tonbridge this is based on operation of the Leigh FSA. A warning was issued. We are now issuing warnings to areas based on forecast rainfall as far in advance as possible. We will update the warnings to account for conditions in the catchment		
Town Planning	TMBC	Will the town planners those responsible for planning permission take into consideration the detrimental effect of building on the flood plane to existing houses and businesses?	Caroline Stevens	Tonbridge			When producing the Local Plan and deciding planning applications, including the redevelopment in the Town Centre, the Council takes in account the effect of development on flooding and how development would be affected by flooding. Individual proposals where flooding is likely to be an issue have to be accompanied by a Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) which must demonstrate how any flood risk can be mitigated for the development to proceed satisfactorily. The Council applies national Government policy and guidelines and does so in close consultation with the Environment Agency.
Water levels	EA	Why did less rain in the 3 days leading up to the flood, result in a more severe flood than in 2000?	Paul Bird	Hildenborough	Actually a similar amount of rain fell, but over a wider area, the flows were higher. 300 - 340 m3/s in 2013 as compared to 220 - 250m3/s in 2000.		

Water levels	EA	Why did we flood on Christmas Eve for the first time ever in Hawden Close and have not flooded since despite there continuing to be high levels of rainfall?	Jo and Ian Wallace	Hildenborough	Hildenborough has flooded in the past. We hope the information in the presentation showed that the rain that fell at Christmas was more than in the events prior to or after the Christmas flood.		
Grants	EA	Is there any grant funding available from the government via the local council for homeowners to purchase floodgates, airbrick covers etc.	Via Sue Chalkley	East Peckham	There didn't used to be but we are investigating a recent announcement by the prime minister		
Leigh Barrier	EA	In flood situations, how long does it take for a discharge from the Leigh Barrier to reach East Peckham?	Via Sue Chalkley	East Peckham	10 hours		
Leigh Barrier	EA	What factors determine when and how water is stored/discharged from the Leigh Barrier?	Via Sue Chalkley	East Peckham	The basic principle for an operator is to reduce the flow coming out of the structure as much as possible by using the available storage to its maximum. However the operator must be mindful of the forecast and forecast inflows so as not to overtop the structure as this would make flooding worse.		
Road Closures	KCC Highways	How are road closures coordinated? For example, the road closure signs put up each end of Old Road on Friday afternoon 7th February. Who is informed locally?	Via Sue Chalkley	East Peckham	All road closures are coordinated by KCC and local residents and businesses are notified where closures are planned. The nature of emergency road closures mean that we cannot give prior warning but we do aim to provide adequate signage to minimise the disruption caused.	Following the recent floods we are looking at how we can work with parish councils, the EA and Flood Wardens to get emergency road closures implemented more quickly when flooding occurs	
Sewers	Southern Water	There is also growing gossip about 'the pump' which either failed or was turned off which is why the drains were not flowing away.	Via Sue Chalkley	East Peckham			We have looked at the information available for the pumping stations and there should have been no effect on customers' services at all from WPS performance over the Xmas New Year period. All stations appear to have been operating as designed the only pump failure that occurred was at a duty-standby station and the standby pump took over without problems. Every indication appears to be that the system was dealing with an extreme weather event, but coped and continued running as well as could be expected under the load. If the pumping station details are supplied we can be more specific on response.
Weather Forecast	EA	Can we see evidence that rain was forecast for Christmas day to demonstrate barrier need to release at higher rate		Tonbridge	Yes, make it known as to who wants it and we will supply it		
Street Lighting	KCC	Can the street lights be left on overnight in Danvers Road given the need to see and monitor potential flooding and given the amount of debris in road. Also to protect empty houses		Tonbridge	The streetlights on Danvers Road and Holford Steet have been converted back to "all night" operation		Actioned on Tuesday 11 Feb 2014 until further notice
Parking Concessions	TMBC	Can we have car parking arrangements in place for Danvers Rd etc for contractors working to reinstate people's homes		Tonbridge			Agreed that special permits would be issued. Council staff advising contractors and residents on site how to apply. It is important to have some control to limit potential parking by users of station.
Parking Concessions	TMBC	New Wharf Road and area - when basement car parks are flooded can we have alternative parking arrangements with no cost?		Tonbridge			Yes. This was actioned in response to requests immediately after first incident of flooding. Similar arrangements will be implemented in future.
Sandbags	TMBC	You didn't have enough sandbags for everyone.		Tonbridge			There is no statutory duty for Council's to provide sandbags. However TMBC recognises that in some flooding incidents, sandbags can be a benefit to residents in protecting properties. We have a core stock of approx 2000. This was not enough to meet need on Christmas Eve. We are reviewing our core stock arrangements to cater for any such future incidents.

