

Appendix 2

Spelthorne Borough Council Current Sandbag Policy 22-24

Context and Background

Due to the geography of Spelthorne, some properties and land are at a high risk of major flooding. The risk is present all year round, however as winter approaches the flood risk is heightened due to increased likelihood of rainfall. The most recent major event being in 2014 with some areas also heavily impacted recently in Storm Henk (January 2024). Most natural flood events in the borough result from fluvial (river), pluvial (rain) and ground water flooding or a combination of these.

The primary mandate on Spelthorne Borough Council during a flood is to support residents whose homes have been made uninhabitable by providing rest centres led by Spelthorne's officers and/or alternative temporary accommodation. Below are the rest centres the council has pre-identified to use in the event of an emergency/flooding situation:

- Greeno Centre
- Fordbridge Centre

As well as this, the council also have a number of other direct duties needing to be carried out. The first of these being to ensure the welfare of vulnerable residents known through Spelthorne's services. These residents are to be contacted/evacuated depending on their needs. This requires considerable officer resource. The council will also be required to manage open spaces, working with partner agencies to support the response, assisting evacuation through our community transport for residents needing support. Then post flooding, Spelthorne Borough Council have a role in assisting those impacted whether this be through grants made available by central government as seen in Storm Henk or even just through working with Surrey County Council to provide skips to locations to support with disposals.

Current Spelthorne Borough Council Position:

Current Spelthorne Borough Council policy around sandbags can be seen below:

"Whilst Spelthorne Council cannot provide sandbags for all residents at risk of flooding, we may look to deploy them at a very local level e.g. to protect infrastructure or where sandbags may have a positive net effect on reducing flood risk in some areas. The Council would not deliver sandbags to specific properties, so it is advisable to identify alternative sources from which to acquire sandbags – builders' merchants and local DIY stores may stock sandbags and sand.

Hydrosacs can also be purchased as an alternative to sandbags, which are easier to store and inflated when the threat of flooding is imminent.

If widescale flooding is expected, Community Sandbag Distribution Centres may be set up to allow greater access to sandbags. These centres will be run by volunteers and community groups, facilitated by the Council who will provide equipment, sand and an operating framework.

Sandbags will offer only limited protection and should only be used as a last resort when other measures are not in place - the array of products listed by the National Flood Forum are more likely to protect your home than sandbags."

Challenges around current Spelthorne Borough Council Position:

In the event of a flood there is not a statutory duty for District and Boroughs to provide sandbags.

This policy has been reviewed in preparation for this upcoming winter as part of our winter preparedness preparation. The policy was benchmarked against the following:

- Whether the council's primary responsibilities in a flooding incident would be impacted by the distribution of sandbags.

Appendix 2

- The overall effectiveness of sandbags in protecting property against fluvial, pluvial and groundwater flooding.
- The health and safety impacts on residents and officers.

As mentioned above in a flooding incident the council's main responsibility will be around providing rest centre support, welfare support for vulnerable residents and organising temporary accommodation to residents whose homes have been impacted. By repurposing staff to carry out sandbag provisions this would adversely impact the council's capability to carry out these critical functions.

Guidance around the effectiveness of sandbags/hydrosacs is also scarce both from the Environment Agency and Surrey County Council as the Lead Local Flood Authority with previous EA documents stating "*Sandbags are relatively ineffectively when compared with to purpose-designed flood protection products.*" Sandbags are particularly ineffective against groundwater flooding which heavily impacted Spelthorne Borough Council in 2014.

As well as the lack of clarity around the actual usefulness of sandbags, they are also heavy and difficult for both staff and residents to handle, ultimately carrying an inherent risk of injury. Sandbags are resource intensive with two officers required to fill them (approximately one hour to fill 12 sandbags) and delivery in flood conditions is unsafe for staff. They are also challenging to store in peacetime with the sacking material biodegradable leading to sandbags to perish over a period of time if unused. The council also does not have the capacity to store and distribute adequate numbers of sandbags for the number of households to be impacted across the borough. The Environment Agency does not provide a hard and fast number for the minimum number of sandbags needed to protect a property. Conservative figures state at least six sandbags are required to reduce the impact of 20cm (8 inch) depth of water for a standard door opening and with approximately 130 properties flooded in 2014 this amount of sandbags will not be feasible for the council to store.