

# FACT SHEET



ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

## UCKFIELD FLOODING

- The Environment Agency has a duty to supervise all matters relating to land drainage and flood defence in England and Wales.
- The Environment Agency has powers to maintain and construct flood defences on stretches of main river. It has powers to maintain and construct sea defences.
- The Environment Agency is responsible for the issue of flood warnings. They are distributed to local authorities, emergency services, via the media and to individuals by the free automatic voice messaging service (AVM). The warning levels comprise Flood Watch, Flood Warning, Severe Flood Warning and All Clear.
- The Environment Agency is a statutory consultee for all local authority planning matters which affect the environment/lie in the flood plain. Planning replies to local authorities use government issued planning guidance and local knowledge. Prior to the 90's guidance suggested that, by and large, if a flood plain had good defences the development may be allowed.
- There are a series of Flood Defence Committees in England and Wales which have executive control over all Environment Agency flood defence and land drainage activities. Flood Defence committees are composed of Local Authority (County/Unitary Authority level) and government (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food) appointees.
- The Sussex Flood Defence Committee receives an annual programme of work from the Environment Agency. Should it agree with the programme the required funding must then be raised by a levy on the Local Authorities and through government grant aid on construction of new schemes.
- Every river and stream has a flood plain which the river spills out onto following severe weather. The size of the flood plain depends upon the soil and geology, the size of the river and its gradient.
- Whilst it is possible to reduce the risk of flooding on the flood plain by the construction of flood defences, it is impossible to remove the risk completely. However good the defences are they will be beaten by nature from time to time.
- Given the risk of flooding it is best to avoid development of homes and businesses in the flood plain wherever possible.
- The Environment Agency has used its powers to construct and maintain flood defences in the Uckfield area.

- Substantial urban and industrial development in Uckfield has left a very constricted river channel in the Town centre hemmed in by bridges, mills, the railway and properties. This causes tremendous problems in passing flood flows through the town.
- Following flooding in the 1960's a major flood defence scheme was constructed. Further minor additions were made following flooding in the early 1970s and again in the 1990's.
- September and early October 2000 were very wet. On 9 October over 50mm (2 inches) of rainfall fell in the Uck valley above Uckfield. On the night of 11 and 12 October much of East Sussex recorded 80mm (3 inches) of rainfall and some localities recorded 100 mm (4 inches). 80mm of rainfall is around the normal monthly average. To receive this amount in 12 – 18 hours is extremely exceptional.
- This extreme rain fell on the already saturated ground, immediately ran off into streams and watercourses. It completely swamped them, the whole of the Uck Valley flood plain and Uckfield itself.
- Flood Watches and Flood Warnings had been issued on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> for the Uck. A Severe Flood Warning for the Uck and Uckfield was issued at 0240 hours on 12 October. This was more than 2 hours before the first serious flooding.
- Much of the Uck valley had between 7–8 times the average monthly rainfall in October. This led to further flooding events in the valley which thankfully were not so severe as the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>.
- Since the flooding the Environment Agency has carried out maintenance repairs to defences in the Uck Valley. It has commissioned (at the instigation of the Minister Elliot Morley) a study into the flooding and what can be done to reduce the risk of further events. This study will be completed in the new year.

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