

‘The Story of Riverside Gardens.’

Good afternoon. My name is Kay Jerred and I’m the flood representative for the retirement complex of Riverside Gardens in central Witney.

This is my friend and next door neighbour, Margaret King, who’s been a big help and support to me as we’ve worked together to try to make our community more resilient to flooding.

After the 2020 flood in Witney, we were told we needed to make our community more resilient to flooding. This is our story. *1 Photo

For those of you who don’t know, the complex stretches for about 200 metres alongside the south bank of the river Windrush from just below Woodford Mill right down to Witney Bridge. Most residents are well over 80.

Never did we expect to be spending our retirement fundraising in earnest or fighting for the river Windrush to be maintained, something that used to be undertaken by the National Rivers Authority.

I joined the WFMG early in 2021 to continue to work towards that goal.

Our story started on Christmas Eve in December 2020 at the height of COVID lockdowns. It was dark and very cold.

We’d received a flood alert from Floodline but not a flood warning, which would have told us to expect property flooding.

One aspect that can be overlooked, is that the water comes over the car park and vehicles needed to be moved first.

- Flood photos

The river was now overtopping the bank and already rushing into four properties. The speed of the rising water was very frightening and we were unable to get a response from the Council to supply sandbags.

The awful distress and fear was palpable. The emergency chord was pulled.

Fire crews were here within minutes, which helped psychologically but several of them were relief firemen and hadn't realised we were a vulnerable community.

As the river was still rising, 11 of us were asked to evacuate, 5 of whom were unable to return to their flats for over 6 months and one has yet to return after the trauma.

A member of the EA and several Councillors visited which was good to see, but although we waited to hear about any suggestions/conclusions, nothing was forthcoming.

Margaret and I met to discuss ideas and agreed we never wanted to see that distress again.

I contacted our MP, Robert Courts, who came for an onsite visit that same week. He wrote to DEFRA and the EA that afternoon.

The responses were extremely disappointing. DEFRA stated that we hadn't met the threshold for compensation for the flooded properties (we were in the wrong flood apparently!), and the EA suggested that we needed to become a more resilient community. No finances were available.

Retired Chairperson Ken and his wife, Suzanne, suggested we get snorkel vents for our air bricks (which were cheaper than the 'smart air bricks' the EA had suggested.) Suzanne, was able to get £1,800 of funding from an OCC Councillor which went a good way to funding these for the most at risk residents.

Margaret was very proactive in communicating with residents who were having them.

I was spending hours on research looking for flood protection for our community and making lists of charitable fundraisers who might be able to help.

I requested a meeting with the EA and this took place via Zoom on March 1st 2021 with as many committee members from Riverside who could access Zoom, also joining me.

Having read the 2008 Flood Report recommendations we went into the meeting with several suggestions on mitigating flooding in a sustainable way on the whole of the river Windrush.

We were also dismayed on reading the recommendations from the 2008 Flood Report to see that nearly all actions were 'pending' and still are.

Maddy, the Flood Resilience Officer, made comprehensive notes and was very empathetic.

We wanted to stress the point that the human factor in flooding was not given enough weighting compared to environmental factors.

They are of course interlinked and the good, regular maintenance of an oxygenated river improves life for humans and wildlife.

We started writing to local fundraising groups, but understandably, they were focusing on local COVID needs.

We tried a 3 way partnership approach with the EA & Councils hoping that would free up some funding, but again it was turned down.

We realised we had to look at other means of fundraising and started the process by asking for 3 quotes from reputable flood defence companies. We would then know the sort of costs we were looking at. As it turned out it was a minimum of £60,000!

One company, M3FLOODTEC from Worcs. stood out for us (There are I'm sure, other equally reputable flood companies around). Punctual, knowledgeable, empathetic and no hard- selling.

They were an innovative company who offered the newer passive technology of Flood Doors. This meant that all locking mechanisms were in the handle, so ideal for the more elderly. They also bore a kitemark and were bsi tested.

Lots of thorough research and a chat with Laurence King, the Lead Flood Officer and we'd found our company.

We asked them to bring samples on site and one of the Publica team, Alex, working with Laurence was invited to attend and was impressed by what he saw.

They set up a display of flood defences in our lounge and we had fun putting a flood door outside the Office for a hose to be aimed at it. One or two brave residents were prepared to stand behind the door while water was being fired. Flood Doors seemed ideal but the composite ones which we preferred were very expensive, at just short of £3,000 a door!

Fundraising had to begin in earnest!

I spoke to a senior figure at the National Lottery Community Fund. He said an application could have had a good chance if we could go with a whole community approach with a protective barrier along the whole site. This would then have increased the amount of flooding in other areas, so wasn't an option. It was a Catch 22 situation.

Maddy from the EA, suggested organisations that we could approach for funding. SSEN Resilience Funding was the only one that seemed to fit our needs.

I had phoned the gentleman dealing with applications, who became known as Gareth from Glasgow. He was extremely helpful and encouraged me to apply for the maximum amount of £20,000.

- Photo-Residents' quotes

The application form was very detailed and the appendices were quite lengthy, as we wanted to include everything that could help our case. I sent the comments from residents who'd been flooded and we organised a photo shoot.

Tony, from Woodford Mill came as our photographer and took shots at the western end of Riverside and then anyone who felt able, walked the whole length of Riverside Gardens down to the Bridge for more photos. It took some time as every resident wanted to come!

We applied to SSEN for £20,000 in June 2021 and were told that decisions would be made in September.

We began our own fundraising on site. Margaret organised a cake & Tombola stall. This raised £580.

A sponsored walk was organised and raised £1.000. Two of our gentlemen residents of 90 & 88 completed this walk of 10k -brilliant! Everyone was pulling together.

- Photos of Sale & Walk

Profits from weekly coffee mornings & keep fit sessions organised by Suzanne went into the fund.

William, a supportive neighbour and Chair of WFMG suggested setting up a 'Go Fund Me Page'. Links can be found on our stand in the marquee. We now have a QR code- very high tech!

We had had so many rejections at this point that to keep our spirits up Margaret and I used to joke about how many years it would take us to build resilience relying on our own fundraising. The answer was, we wouldn't be around to complete it!

Early in September I received a phone call from Gareth to hear that SSEN had agreed to give us the full £20,000. Wonderful news!

When we told the most at risk residents there was stunned silence, and then spontaneous applause- the relief was palpable.

- Flood door photo

In December 2021 we were able to fit 10 front flood doors, 4 French flood doors and 2NRVS.

We also purchased, 3 door defenders and 3 communal door defenders, which can be seen on our stand.

This was a great start, but more needed to be done.

Out of the blue, I received an email in June 2022 from SSEN asking me if I'd thought of applying for more funding this year. I hadn't realised I could!

The forms had to be in within 7 days, so I shut myself away for much of the week getting quotes for all the new doors, as exact amounts had to go on the application.

In July, Margaret organised another cake and Tombola Stall with café style seating and I invited a local group, 'The WoodenTops to entertain us. Liz Duncan, our Mayor, Councillor and big support, opened the Event. Another £500 was raised. Other local Councillors have also been very supportive.

At the end of August Gareth rang telling me they weren't giving us £20,000 this year,but that the whole SSEN Resilience Committee wanted to give us double that with £40,000!

I made a slightly strangled noise down the phone and Gareth said it was the only time he'd ever heard me not calm and collected!
Everyone was thrilled!

The final order went through last week and M3FLOODTEC is hoping to get it all installed before Christmas. Drinks and mince pies are promised if they do!

It means that 18 flats on Riverside Gardens will have new front flood doors and 8 downstairs flats will have French flood doors at the back too. The Communal area housing the office, lounge and launderette will also have a front flood door.

Prices have risen as costs of materials have increased.
It means we have 2 French flood doors still needing to be replaced and more NRVS and Floodsaxs are needed, but we are nearly there.
(We're hoping to hear good news from the Town Council next week about other help with sandbag storage).

Our next job is setting up an account for future maintenance and other purchases which could well become necessary.

Riverside Gardens is a wonderful place to live, peaceful but central for amenities. The whole community has been supportive and encouraging of our efforts.

Yes, we had to learn quickly and made mistakes along the way, but every property that was flooded in the 2007 & 2020 floods will have a front flood door and/or some flood mitigation in place by Christmas.

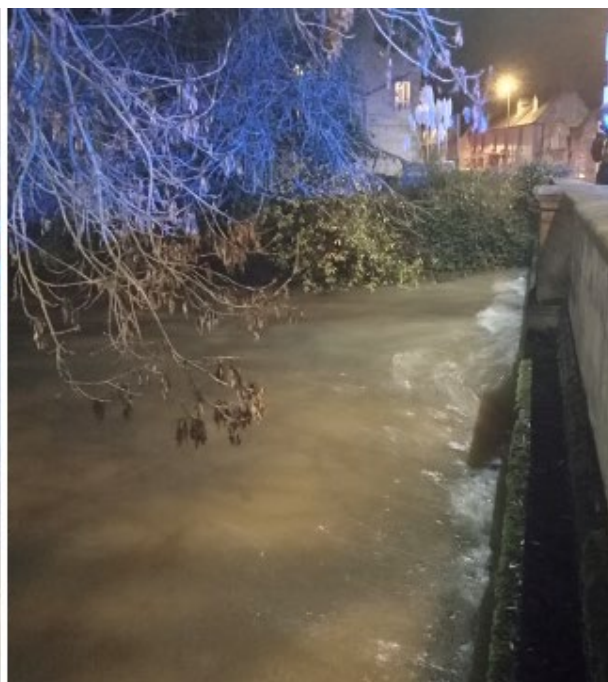
Thank you for coming to hear the Story of Riverside Gardens today and do visit our stall in the marquee if you want any further information. Thank you.

The Story of Riverside Gardens

Kay Jerred

Riverside Gardens Flood Representative, WFMG Founder





I moved here in 2005 and have various health issues. In 2007 water enveloped properties within $\frac{3}{4}$ of an hour. With water already at the top of my thighs, I struggled to my neighbour who was very unwell. This Christmas, alerted by a neighbour, I saw water pouring into my next door neighbour's flat; I was so worried for them. Then came the frustration and anger: 'Here we go again', I thought, 'why has nothing been done in the 13 years between!' I felt complete despair.

