



Pett Level Flooding Risks

Background Info

Summary

Following the flooding on 16th January 2023 18 houses were devastated by floodwater and sewage and numerous families were forced to evacuate their homes. Many of those families have only just been able to return to their homes. The distress and disruption caused by such an event cannot be overstated.

Flood event - what happened 16 January 2023

We have spoken to all relevant governmental and non-governmental bodies about the flooding. No party has either accepted responsibility nor given a full explanation for what happened. However all parties are agreed that:

- There had been an exceptional level of rain in the area in the 24 hours preceding the flood, with 42mm of rain overnight of 15/16 January
- The storm tanks at Southern Water's Fairlight Water Treatment Works were overwhelmed and untreated sewage was released into the Marsham Sewer and subsequently entered people's homes and gardens
- The culvert at Chick Hill changed the course of the flood water; the volume of water was unable to pass through the culvert and so spilled out across the National Trust lands next to Chick Hill, which then flowed down the road and into Marsham Brook Lane
- The speed of the flooding meant that the emergency pumps and other flood defences were not set up or used in time to prevent damage to property
- There was no warning about potential flooding and when residents tried to report the flooding they were told that no flooding had taken place

Flood event - Additional supporting evidence

We have included in the appendix to this document detailed accounts from residents about what happened to them and their homes on 16th January 2023.

We have also included:

- a link to two videos showing the speed of the flow of the flood water. This was such that many residents were trapped in their homes and were only able to escape with the help of relatives and the emergency services
- a number of photos of the flood waters and the devastation caused
- a map illustrating the flooded area

Appendices

- 16 January timeline
- 16 January residents' personal statements
- 16 January video and photos
- Map of affected area



16 January timeline - resident's account

06:00 Weather was moderate to light rain. A few puddles of water were evident in the back garden, which is normal during winter months. The sewer/drain running through the front of our property was mid-way level and gave no cause for concern.

07:30 Alerted by the sound of fast flowing water at the side of our property. Upon inspection this was flowing rapidly from the front garden and into the back garden. The sewer/drain in the front garden had overflowed its banks resulting in approximately six inches of water covering the front garden. The back garden was under water by nine inches to one foot and rising.

08:00 Checked the UK gov website for flood alerts and noted that no alerts or warnings in place for TN35 4EH

08:05 Telephoned EA Emergency team who stated the matter was not their concern and directed me to telephone EA Help Line. The EA help line also said that it was not their responsibility but a matter for Southern Water Company. I challenged this response as they regularly enter our front garden and check the water levels in front drain/sewer. In addition they access our front garden and change the sluice gate blocks twice a year. At this point the person I spoke to advised me that he would make a report of my call, but did not offer any further advice other than for me to call emergency services on 999.

08:10 Telephoned the emergency services but was informed no fire crew availability at present as they were already attending a flood incident in the local vicinity. They would visit us as soon as they became free.

08:15 Three Environment Agency (EA) operatives turned up at the front of our property and waded through the garden to ask if we required any sandbags. We said yes as water levels were rising rapidly. We asked them what had happened and they said a number of houses had been affected by the rush of water coming from Fairlight. They advised us that they had reported the sudden rise in water level to the EA manager first thing in the morning, but it was dismissed as he was due to finish his shift in the next hour.

09:00 Flood water entered the property in the front porch. Over the next thirty to forty minutes the breach extended to other rooms in the property to a depth of around four inches. We attempted to bail out but this proved inefficient given that water was entering the property quicker than we could bail.

09:30 Fire Brigade were on site, however, they were unable to provide a pump out service as there was nowhere to pump the water.

09:45 EA operatives returned with numerous sandbags and helpfully positioned them at breach points at the property. They asked us if we would like an electric water pump and we accepted their offer. This was delivered to the house by EA around 1330hrs

10:00 Water level now three feet deep across the back garden, which extended into Marsham Brook Lane at the rear of our property, and to neighboring gardens. The next few hours were spent trying to bail out contaminated water from numerous rooms and to lift as many electrical items as possible from the floor, along with pieces of furniture where this was viable.

14:00 Our son travelled from Tunbridge Wells to help us both evacuate from the premises along with our dog. He had purchased a pair of fishing waders en route which proved invaluable in the rescue.

16 January residents' personal statements (1)

My husband and I moved to Pett Level a little over a year ago with the intention of enjoying retirement in this small, picturesque seaside village.

On the morning of 16 January 2023, we encountered a rapid flowing surge of sewage water which contaminated everything in its path and flooded both our front and back gardens and at the same time entered our home through the air bricks and floorboards.

I have separately provided a timetable of events and the different parties involved during the incident. However, this does not cover the personal effect the flood has caused and therefore the purpose of this statement is to describe how the impact of the events of 16 January have affected me and my family.

The extent of the damage to our property and infrastructure is not yet known, although we have been given a proposed date of October before we can return to our home. Initially we had no alternative than to stay at our son's home in Ashford, although we now have a short-term rental property in Rye. This expires early in August, so I am already worried about being homeless again before our home is in a habitable state.

The contaminated water destroyed everything in its path, and most of our electrics and home furnishing have been destroyed. Seeing our personal belongings piled high in our back garden was alarming and the feeling of helplessness at the situation is overwhelming. My customised car was also written off due to being immersed in 3 feet of contaminated water. I had purchased the car as a gift to myself on retirement and it had represented my 45 years of work. Every day delivered yet more devastation, and there are times where I have struggled to keep strong in the face of adversity.

Within days of being flooded, all fabrics such as clothes, shoes, bags, mattresses, towels, bedding etc., were covered in mould and mildew and the stench is horrendous. I suffer with asthma, so particularly in the early days I would have to rely heavily on my prescribed inhaler when visiting the property as the damp and mould affected my breathing. This often made meetings with various Insurance personnel difficult.

The loss of memorabilia has been the hardest for both my husband and I to cope with, specifically old photos of family generations and our wedding album. All these photos were taken before the digital age, so we have no way of getting a copy. I will never see the faces of some of the deceased members of family and I am deeply saddened by this.

16 January residents' personal statements (2)

At this stage it is difficult to quantify the budgetary impact of the flood, so this is a constant worry. I am currently having to cover two sets of property bills and replace various day to day items that have been removed by the insurance company. I expect to be re-imbursed in due course, but in the meantime, I am living with the fear that there may be a shortfall and that this claim will affect our insurance cover and premiums at renewal time.

The damage of the flood is not just limited to my personal possessions; the stress suffered by the disruption to day to day living and the loss of community life is often difficult to cope with. The smell of the flood still haunts me, and I worry about the emotional impact this may have on me in the future. I have lost so many of my treasured belongings and I feel angry that this can be allowed to happen. We never received any warnings that Southern Water were going to release contaminated water and the force at which it hit our property was alarming and most certainly put people's lives at risk. As things stand, it is inevitable that when I return to Rosedene, I will live in a state of anxiety and fear that this will happen again.

This statement has been very upsetting to collate, the resident finds it very hard to talk about what happened.

This statement has been written by a neighbour as the resident is an 84 years old lady who lives on her own, and she has lost everything, along with all her late husband's belongings.

The resident has given her consent for this to be added to the other statements.

On 16 January a neighbour knocked on her door about 08.15 hrs and told her to watch the water levels as they seem to be rising. The resident tried to put her floodgate up but all of a sudden the water was gushing in.

The resident called out for help, her shoes were floating down the hallway, by this stage she was petrified and crying out for help and no one was there.

16 January residents' personal statements (3)

All alone and bare foot up to her knees in flood water she walked back to get her tablets, all the time alone crying for help, she said she was petrified and still is upset as to what has happened to her home and memories.

Her nephew came and dragged her out of the house as fast as he could due to the rising water. He drives a 4x4 so managed to get through, they just grabbed a couple of things and then left.

The fire brigade never got to her to get her out it and the flood water was up to her knees when her nephew got her.

Her nephew took her to Jempsons and they let her have a wash. She then had to go to the charity shop to buy some clothes and spent 2 nights with a friend, very distressed and depressed worried about her home in ruins.

Her nephew was phoning everywhere to try and get accommodation.

She ended up in a (as she says) lovely hotel in Rye where the people were very nice. But if that room was already booked she had to move to another hotel.

This was very upsetting having to go somewhere else and then back again to her lovely hotel.

She then went to stay at her friend's house whilst she went on holiday.

She used to come down by bus to Pett Level every day as she had a cat that stayed in her shed. This was also very upsetting for her having to leave her cat.

In her own words this has been very stressful and upsetting and she is very worried that it could happen again, the water came gushing into my home.

16 January residents' personal statements (4)

We packed up and moved twelve times before we finally moved into our long term rental property. With two children aged 2 years old and 6 months old, with no travel cots and minimal belongings as we had to leave so quickly and so much was damaged in the floodwater. It was an extremely stressful and exhausting time.

The insurers have stated that anything touched by 'blackwater' is to be replaced, which living in a bungalow means most of our belongings. The kids belongings were kept on the floor for ease of access, they have lost the majority of their things. We have been without all of our basic belongings for almost 3 months. Our eldest is constantly asking when we are going home.

I've suffered with anxiety since the flood. The anxiety that the next time this happens (and it will happen again with things as they are), that the kids may not be able to get out of the house safely. That we won't be there to help if we're both at work and my nearly 70 year old mother in law is looking after them both on her own. That they won't be able to leave as she cannot carry two children at the same time. The floodwater was fast flowing sewage, my eldest child cannot walk through it. That they won't be able to retreat upstairs to 'ride out' the flood water as we live in a bungalow. That the kids are still at an age where they are full of energy and won't sit nicely on a table or the kitchen side waiting for someone to come and help. And let's be clear, no one came to help residents during the flood to help (certainly the initial stage). There is every possibility they could be left in the house, alone, in feet deep sewage water. Which for the kids, is a real risk to their lives.

Quite frankly, I don't want to go home with the fear of Southern water doing this again the next time we get heavy rain. We've considered putting them both into nursery as a safety precaution. But we can't afford to put them both into nursery, and shouldn't have to. The only reason we are considering it is due to the risk of flooding as Southern Water can't cope with the volume of water coming in and will discharge large volumes of sewage on a direct path to our residential area.

It's turned our home, our safe place, into a place of fear.

16 January residents' personal statements (5)

I initially discovered the flood late afternoon on 16th January 2023 as I had returned from visiting my niece in Bournemouth. My initial reaction was shock and despair as I did not really know where to start. Luckily I had some boots in my car and the water level was around this height and as I moved around the water was entering my boots. The water was black. The weather was freezing and it was about to get dark. I telephoned my niece who I had just visited, to say I had arrived back home safely and told her what had happened. Luckily I did this as unbeknown to me, she contacted my other niece who lives more locally in Eastbourne (although I did not know this at the time). I then telephoned the insurance company but got cut off as the battery on my mobile phone died and I had no way of charging it. I could not contact anyone as my landline phone was not working and it was getting very dark. I took a gamble and drove to my brother's house in Eastbourne. I knew they were away in Australia and I also knew I couldn't remember the way to their daughter house as most times we gathered together at my brothers home. Luckily she was there waiting for me but was very worried as both her and my niece in Bournemouth could not get hold of me and wasn't sure whether to wait or come looking. I think that night I was in shock. I hardly slept that night and when I did was frequently woken with nightmares. Since then, I have struggled to sleep and keep on having recurring bad dreams.

When I woke the next day, the realisation of what had happened started to sink in. Aside from the daunting task of trying to sort everything out, the most traumatic part of this experience has been seeing my home and belongings completely ruined. My wife and I bought our home for our retirement as our 'forever home' and we were very happy. Unfortunately, my wife passed away a few years ago. Since then, I had not moved her belongings as they bring great comfort to me. This, undoubtedly, has been the most distressing part of the flooding. It feels like our home is not our home anymore and due to the sewage in the water, much has had to be disposed of and this includes many irreplaceable items of great sentimental value to me.

Another issue has been that I do not know how to use the internet and nor do I have an email address. In today's world, this has made communication extremely difficult. Fortunately, my family have rallied around and helped, but it is very time consuming and I find it upsetting and frustrating that I cannot deal with things myself.

16 January residents' personal statements (6)

Since the flood, we have experienced a catalogue of issues with the insurers. I say 'we' as it has been either my niece or brother and sister in law dealing with the insurers on my behalf. Initially we were provided with the wrong advice, then the claims company said they could not do anything until they received the schedule. It was only on Friday 20th (the flood occurred on Monday 16th January), after much chasing, the claims company stated they had the schedule. However, we then found out they had it much earlier. We then had the long wait for the loss adjuster to be appointed. At this point, it was clear the claims company was not going to be easy to deal with, and due to the extent of damage and therefore size of the claim, we decided to appoint a loss assessor to deal with the claims company on our behalf. Even with the appointment of a loss assessor and their expertise, there have still been constant delays. Not only did we have to wait weeks for a loss adjuster to be appointed, but then wait for the appointment and then further delays until the claim was approved. No works (including drying) could be carried out until approval had been given, despite chasing by our loss assessor, a complaint and reminders of the secondary damage occurring. The claim was finally accepted on 2 March 2023 - six and a half weeks after the flood occurred.

The secondary damage that has now occurred is from mould spores. Where initially the damage was limited to around the water level, nearly everything has to be thrown away now due to the mould. Where perhaps some items could have been saved, the sewage in the flood water has prevented much salvaging.

The final big issue has been emergency/alternative accommodation. As my brother and sister in law were away during January, I was able to stay in their home. However, upon their return, as they only have one bed, I was sleeping on their sofa. Whilst very grateful, I am in my late seventies with arthritis so this was not ideal. The insurers agreed to find me temporary accommodation until they could find a six month let. I asked to stay in the premier inn or travelodge near my brother. At first, they said I had to stay in one of the hotels they chose but these were in notorious high crime areas or in hotels known in the local area for illegal immigrants being housed. The insurers finally agreed I could stay in the local premier inn but this took much negotiation by my sister in law. This was on 12th February. I am still in hotel accommodation but unfortunately I have had to change hotels and there is no certainty for me. The initial bookings were being made on a fortnightly basis. My sister in law, upon acceptance of the claim and thinking ahead of peak season and Easter, requested my bookings be longer. They were reduced to weekly bookings. Not only this, but the insurers leave it to the last minute to rebook and because of this I have had to change rooms and hotel. My sister in law is constantly liaising with the hotel and insurers to check there is some continuity but they only confirm a day or two before. It is extremely stressful on both me and my family and taking up a lot of unnecessary time. This week, on the 7th, I have to move out of the hotel. It is Good Friday and also my birthday. The only reason we knew this is because my sister in law enquired availability over Easter.

16 January residents' personal statements (7)

If she hadn't of done this, I would have only found out the day before. The insurers have still not booked after this. Obviously with Easter weekend, we don't know if I will be back in the hotel or not, or if they can find anywhere else alternative. My niece in Bournemouth would like to visit for my birthday but I cannot tell her where I will be. With the peak season coming up soon, it is causing a lot of worry.

Longer term accommodation has also been unsuccessful. The insurers are not looking for like for like accomodation and looking at the bottom of the market. Unfortunately in this housing crisis, as soon as we enquire with the agent (which is immediately after), we are told the properties are already let. I have only been given details for two properties. The insurers will not book long term in the premier inn or travel lodge even though they know the remedial works will take six months (or maybe more).

All of this is extremly distressing. I feel angry that my life has been turned upside down and the incident has led on to further issues with the insurers which would not have happened if the flooding had not taken place. I still can't sleep, I have nightmares , I am unsettled, feel anxious, stressed and worried. I cannot settle physically or mentally and feel drained. All of mine and my wife's belongings which we had accumulated in our life together have literally been washed and cannot be replaced. My day to day life is different. I feel isolated in a hotel room and although my family are nearby, I am not in my normal routine, environment and community so this is having a detrimental effect too both financially and on my general health. I cannot be independent and keep myself busy with daily chores, shopping and cooking in a hotel room. I need to keep active due to my arthritis, so this is not helping. I have to eat out and this is costing more money. Breakfast is paid for by the insurance company but I still need to pay for my evening meal. I cannot amuse myself with my hobbies I would normally do in my hotel room. Everything is different. The effect of my home has been life changing but in a negative way. If this transpires to have been caused by anything other than natural causes, I hope the person who made the decision or was negligent, experiences the same so they would know first hand the devastation it has brought to my life.

Not just now but for the future, as there are so many unanswered questions that I can't answer to make me feel safe and that it won't happen again!

If someone was negligent, what has been put in place to prevent it happening again?

If natural causes, what other flood defences are needed in the area & in my home? as this apparently (according to most of the local residents) was nothing like the many normal times they have had heavy rain fall before! And a lot of flood defence work had been successfully done before my wife & I moved in.

16 January residents' personal statements (8)

Not knowing for sure what happen prevents me from taking the correct action to safe guard myself and my property for the future & the worry of this will not only affect greatly on my health and mental state, also the value of my property to if it is saleable anymore!?

As work progress to rectify the damage I am having to watch the home that my wife & I bought together being torn apart bit by bit, it's heartbreaking every time I look at it!

Lock down during covid was bad enough, but what has happened is much worse.

Lockdown did end & I could meet my family & friends again, but most of all I felt my wife was near every time I saw her things.

The flood destroyed her things forever. Destroyed our home forever. Destroyed my life forever!

Yes I can buy replacements. I can build a new home. Yes I can make a new life! BUT I didn't WANT to!

I wanted it the same and it will never be the same again and all because of the flood!

Now everyday I am asked to do things I can't do, like give a email address & password, listen to a voice mail, send a text, photocopy paperwork then email it.

I just about make a call on my simple phone & answer if someone calls me, but that is it.

I don't understand technology at all, I have tried, but I just don't understand it!

All of this now falls on my family to do it for me, which takes away my independence. Virtually everyday someone is asking them to do something for me regarding the flood.

Hopefully I maybe moving into long term accommodation soon, again that has only been possible as a neighbour was looking on the internet & my family doing all the paperwork via emails, texts & sending details on to letting agents. My family have been the ones who have given more help to me when I needed it most.

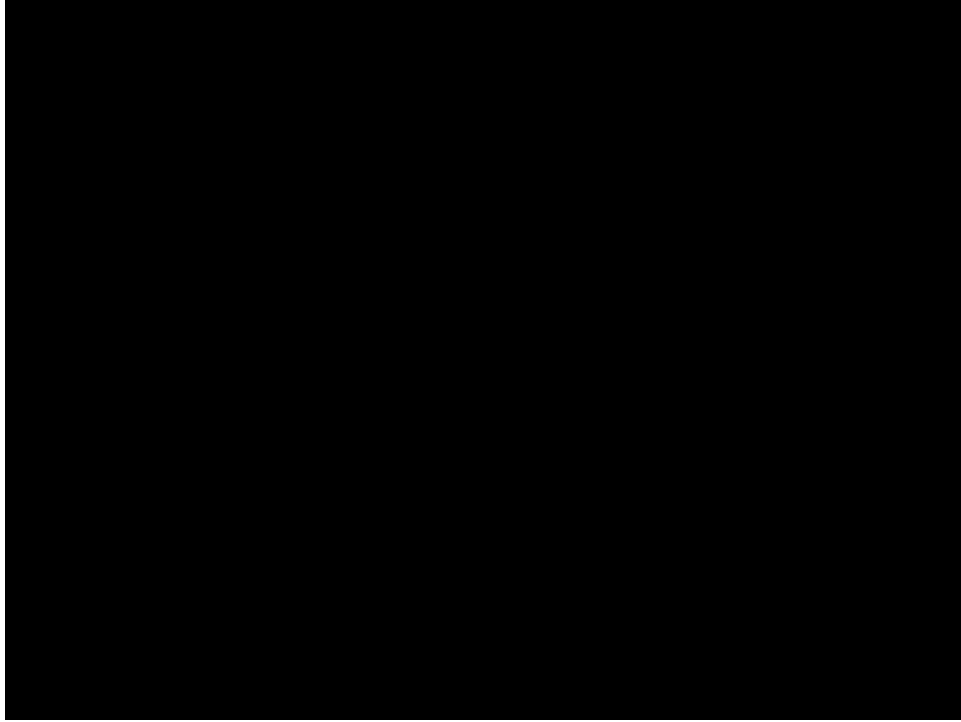
Yes, I am very grateful & without their help I would be in a much worse position, but I feel it should never have happened & ask why have I been put in this situation?

When my wife & I bought our bungalow the previous owners said there had not been a flood in our property since the latest flood defences were installed ie local ditches & drains etc improved, also Southern Water had been opening their flood gates on many occasions, along with heavy bouts of rain fall & all had been ok. So what was different this time?

16 January videos and photos



16 January videos and photos



16 January videos and photos



16 January videos and photos



16 January videos and photos



Map of affected area

