

BENEATH THE WATERLINE

The personal cost of flooding

A DEEPER PROBLEM

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Flooding is generally understood to be ‘water where it usually isn’t or where it shouldn’t be’. But to truly understand what flooding is and to comprehend the real-life implications of the event, you have to engage with the people who experience it. There are life-long impacts at stake, and it’s so much more than just water in the lounge.

When flood water invades a home, the emotional, psychological, social and financial issues flow in too. These are very important to understand and gain an appreciation that the experience of flooding can negatively impact people’s quality of life and their health years after the water has subsided.

Presented here are the lived experiences of people who have flooded, collected through one-to-one interviews as part of a research project. These are the often unseen and underestimated consequences of flooding, so that flood authorities and policymakers can gain a complete view of the life-altering challenges that flood communities are left to struggle with as they learn to cope with the new reality of living at risk of flooding.



THE ENDURING SPIRIT OF COMMUNITIES

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People who have experienced first-hand the effects of flooding on their communities and are proactively working for change often self-identify as 'Floodies'. These communities act as a vital emotional and logistical support network to cope with the fallout of flooding, battling towards reducing flood risk and ideally never flooding again.

They're devoted to reclaiming flood-prone areas as places to live good quality lives and have a wealth of experience and knowledge about local flooding, its changing patterns and often have a very good understanding of what local flood management techniques and approaches are required.

There is a real opportunity to foster strong and productive relationships with flood authorities to ensure that progress can be made together through combining knowledge and expertise and working together in partnership to better manage flooding.

This can all be undermined by misunderstanding what flooding is to those who experience it and what the aims of flood communities are.



THE CURRENT PERCEPTION OF FLOODING



During flood events, the headlines cover how high the water got and how long it was there for.

Media images show cars floating by and people trapped at upper floor windows. For those who flood, flooding really starts once the blue lights, camera crews and politicians have left. What we see is only the beginning.

For those affected, 'flooding' carries on through their home being recovered, redecorated, and moving back in – often into a house that they don't even recognise as their home anymore. It continues through the fear of rain, the reluctance to leave their home unattended, and a mistrust in the process of future flood prevention.

THE CURRENT PERCEPTIONS ON FLOODING



THE UNSEEN CONSEQUENCES

The real impact of flooding for those who experience it is spelled out by anxiety and emotional turmoil.

Everyone reacts differently to the fear and uncertainty of being flooded out of their home, but the effects are long-lasting and can range from rainfall anxiety (the fear of rain) to severe PTSD. These stories from people and communities that have experienced flooding first hand, sometimes over multiple occasions, show just a few of the less familiar impacts that floodwater has had on their lives.

THE UNSEEN
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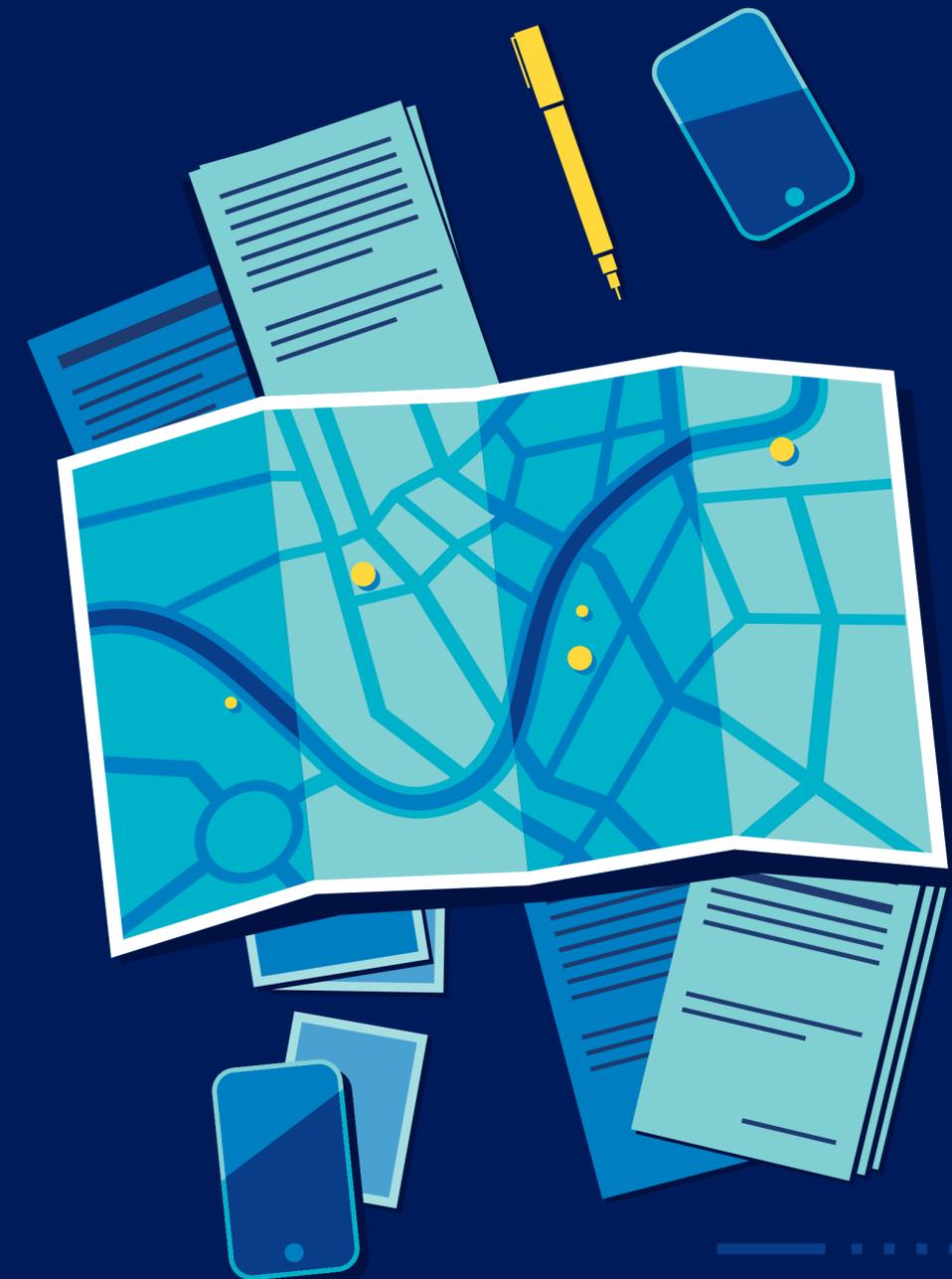
I was a firefighter for 29 years. I've seen lots of horrible sights as you can imagine. I can handle stress reasonably well, but the flood stress is still, you know, terrible for me. I still struggle when they say it's going to rain heavily.

PROGRESS THROUGH SHARING KNOWLEDGE

The complex topic of flood management requires a holistic approach, with policymakers and authorities conscious of the real-life implications for communities.

Knowledge gained from 'Floodies' can then be properly considered and used to inform new policy additions. Updates are needed to current flood management legislation to take into account essential factors such as psychological, social and community support, financial support and help in adapting homes.

Flood communities need to be at the heart of flood risk management. They hold a vast amount of experiential and technical knowledge about flooding, and so a culture of open collaboration is essential to developing a viable means of mitigation and adaptation.



**PROGRESS
THROUGH
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KNOWLEDGE**



A BRIGHTER FUTURE

Working in collaboration with communities is like any other partnership, with communication, open-mindedness and trust being integral to a successful outcome.

With emotions often running high and memories still raw, it's easy to feel the battle lines being drawn. Flood communities have often been to hell and back, so compassion and patience are key to ensuring productive conversations.

The responsibility lies with everyone to ensure that insight and expertise is gathered from all sides, with the lessons learned from knowledgeable flood communities informing future policies and plans. By listening and learning, we can all help to ensure that those affected by flooding feel supported, from the sound of the first rain drop through the long road to recovery.

