BALLATER FLOODING ISSUES GROUP UPDATE
BALLATER & CRATHIE COMMUNITY COUNCIL (BCCC)
www.ballaterandcrathiecommunitycouncil.com
Minutes of Public Meeting held Thursday 28th November 2024 at 7pm

Presenters:
John Bannerman – FIG coordinator
Lucile Verrot
Dr Hamish Moir – CBEC
Andy Ford – CNPA (Dee Resilience Group)

John Bannerman (JB) welcomed everyone to the meeting to give an update on the work of the BCCC Flooding Issues Group (FIG) over the last year. He emphasised that members of FIG were volunteers and not flood defence experts, doing their best to understand and interpret flooding issues for the community. He thanked Richard Frimston, former leader of the group (remaining a member) and introduced the other members: Philip Benzie, Tom Flynn, John Morrison, Lucile Verrot and Martin Ellison. New volunteers with time, energy and patience would be very welcome.
This meeting was intended as an update and not for any decision-making. FIG would outline their various workstreams and Dr Hamish Moir of CBEC would introduce the phase 1 of the study undertaken by his company and Andy Ford would introduce the work of the Dee Resilience Group.
JB started with a graph showing the river flow rates for the River Dee since Storm Frank in 2015. Storm Frank river flow rate was approximately 1,250 cubic metres per second. Further flooding events in 2021, 2023 and 2024 had shown flow rates of around 500 - 700 cubic metres per second. Anything under 450 cubic metres per second was unlikely to cause any flooding issues in Ballater. The flow rates were taken from monitoring stations on the Muick, Polhollick and the Gairn, combining to give the flow rate for the Dee going through Ballater. Following Storm Frank in terms of flooding Ballater had 5 quiet years and then 3 "noisy" years.
As a result of the change of river course in 2021, the Ballater Additional Flood Study had been undertaken, the results showed that the village faced an increased risk during high-frequency, low-level flooding and in the 1 in 200 year type flood event nothing had changed. The results of that study supported the construction of the Hesco box bund.
Workstream 1 – flood alerts
Lucile Verrot works for SEPA, in the flood forecasting section. She lives in Ballater, in the flood zone and presented information from the public domain:
SCOTTISH FLOOD FORECAST (https://scottishfloodforecast.sepa.org.uk/) gives a 3-day forecast for the whole of Scotland and is compiled daily by the Met office and

SEPA. It will show areas of concern in yellow, amber and red, depending on the severity of potential flooding. It includes coastal as well as river flooding.
FLOODLINE (https://www.sepa.org.uk/environment/water/flooding/floodline/) is a service provided by SEPA. Members of the public can sign up for telephone or e-mail alerts, prompting them to consult the website for details of potential flooding in their area. There are 19 regional alert areas and Ballater is in Aberdeenshire, which means that we also get alerts for coastal flooding which does not affect the village.
FLOOD WARNINGS again provided by SEPA with a model specific to Ballater showing all areas at risk of flooding in the village. Not every community has such a model, but past history has given the village this benefit.
Finally, Lucile reminded the meeting that it is extremely difficult to forecast snow melt and its effects on river levels. She urged everyone to be especially vigilant during times of snow melt which can cause the Dee to rise very quickly.
She also made it clear that SEPA would welcome reports of localised flooding from members of the public as any such information can be extremely helpful in providing flood information in the future.
JB thanked Lucile and remarked that we are fortunate that SEPA operates 365 days (7/24) a year offering flood warnings, allowing the village to have advance warning of flooding. In the event of a major flood, Police Scotland would have overall control, although local Fire & Rescue under Station Officer Richard Cooper, would have initial control until the arrival of Police Scotland. The Ballater Chiels are never far away if needed. The Ballater Resilience Group, led by Linda Drever, during a flooding event, would open the Halls as a rest centre for anyone requiring it.

Workstream 2 – Property Level Protection

John Morrison of FIG had intended to present this section but was unable to attend the meeting. However, he has written several reports on this subject which can be found on BCCC website (https://www.ballaterandcrathiecommunitycouncil.com/flood-issues) outlining engineered solutions to property flooding such as flood gates, non-return valves etc and other related issues such as insurance, Flood re and build back better.

Workstream 3 – Opposition to Option 3A

It had been clear from previous meetings that there was strong community opposition to Option 3A, the flood defence option supported by Aberdeenshire Council. It seems unlikely that government funds will be available for Option 3A, but FIG continues to make clear to ABCo that the community do not support 3A. FIG recognise that Mr. Anthony Cox had proposed to ABCo a modified 3A at the time of the funding application however at this time 3A is the only show in town for ABCo. There is a view in the village that if funding is forth coming we as a community will be able to materially modify 3A, but following many discussions with ABCo FIG believes this to be extremely unlikely.

Workstream 4 – short term solutions

The most recent example of this is the Hesco box bund at the golf course. This project was funded by, Ballater Caravan Park, the Ballater Chiels, ABCo and CNPA with support from Ballater golf club, local estates (Balmoral, Abergeldie, Invercauld) local volunteers and ABCo planning . Thanks, were also due to Wee Jim, the main contractor. This bund mitigates against high frequency low level flooding, but it is not a formal defence and would provide no protection in a Storm Frank scenario.

JB then introduced **Dr Hamish Moir**, co-founder of CBEC, the company which has undertaken the most recent survey of the river to evaluate what other local options are available following on from the Hesco boxes.

CBEC has undertaken a topographical survey of the river from the top of the golf course all the way round to the Royal Bridge. Their options to mitigate flooding are 'green enginnering', looking at working with the river. They have identified 10 options, ranging from doing nothing to building further bunds, opening storage areas, re-directing the river back to its original course etc. There are constraints such as the physical character of the river, maintaining village aesthetics and maintaining the golf course and caravan site as important economic vectors for the village. CBEC has looked at each option and rated them according to degree of development required, how well each option would deliver on flood mitigation, and potential cost. Some options will only benefit the village at high level flows, while others would benefit the village at lower levels. BRD were successful in raising external funds to support this work.

All the options can be examined in detail on the BCCC website. (https://www.ballaterandcrathiecommunitycouncil.com/flood-issues)

In next stage phase CBEC will build a mathematical model to better quantify the options – this work is being funded by BRD, CNPA and ABCo.

JB is confident that if the modelling demonstrates that a particular option can provide a material gain in flood resilience for the village, and if there is a consensus in the village, we will find the money to deliver it.

JB then introduced **Andy Ford** of CNPA to talk about the Dee Resilience Group. The Dee Resilience Group is committed to bringing together ALL stakeholders in the Dee catchment area with a view to finding upstream solutions to flooding and drought on the River Dee. The Group had brought together Aberdeenshire Council, Scottish Water, SEPA, NatureScot, River Dee Trust, CNPA, DCP, local estates and FIG, - together they can come up with outcomes resulting in multiple positive results to improve the River Dee, so that a flooding solution might also improve biodiversity as well. Additionally, it is an attempt to ensure that all public bodies are striving towards similar goals, working better together.

JB reported that Ballater & Crathie Community Council worked with Braemar Community Council and Mid Deeside Community Council to ensure they were all on the same page regarding the dual climate change challenges of flooding and drought. It is in everyone's interest to find ways to smooth the flow of the River Dee, reducing peaks (floods) and increasing troughs (droughts).

JB then asked the audience if they had any questions.
Hamish Moir was asked if he knew at what level of flow would water start to back up on Dee Street. He believes that current data suggests at 650 cubic metres per second, but the modelling would show in more detail, as well as indicating what options might reduce or indeed increase that risk.

Bruce Lawson pointed out that in the recent snow melt, the channel at Invermuick had already activated (one of the options suggested by CBEC). Hamish Moir said that it was hoped that with some green engineering this could be enhanced.

It was asked if any of the proposed bunds would affect properties in the village below the Royal Bridge. It was pointed out that modelling should show any negative impact such as this and no work would be allowed to go ahead if it negatively affected other areas.

A query was raised as to the timescale of options available. Hamish Moir believed that modelling would take up the first half of 2025, then consultation and planning would take a further 6 months at least, so spring 2026 would be the earliest start to any work on the ground.

Tom Flynn also pointed out that once an option had been selected, there would remain the issue of funding.

Phil Howard asked about the impact of the Royal Bridge on choking the flow of the river. Hamish Moir replied that the Bridge did impede flow and that would be factored into the modelling. It could well be that the bridge might make some of the options ineffective.

It was asked if a river flow monitor at the bridge might be helpful. While it was agreed that this would indeed be helpful, it is not a priority.
Richard Frimston pointed out that the Dee with the various river gauges was well monitored.

Andy Ford said that individual studies from different groups on the river should be of benefit to all going forward.

It was asked if dredging would benefit the river. Hamish Moir pointed out that the RPS study suggested that dredging was a short-term solution with little effect. An average flood would infill a recently dredged channel.

Neil Duncan said that the measurement of water levels in m3/sec was very helpful especially in the context of Storm Frank and asked why other bodies like SEPA measure in return periods which are difficult to follow. Hamish Moir replied that return periods were used to facilitate comparisons across the country whereas flow rates are river specific.

The proposed North Bund allows for protection over 750 cm3/sec, Neil also asked why the North Bund had been categorised as low Priority in the CBEC options summary. Hamish Moir replied that at this stage higher priority was given to options which potentially address the higher frequency floods.

JB emphasised that FIG always welcome questions from villagers – feel free to contact any member of FIG with any questions you might have. The next public meeting will be to show the results of the modelling and to propose an option to be developed.

Richard Frimston thanked the FIG team and John Bannermen for all their efforts.

Meeting ended at 20.30.