

Ballater & Crathie Community Council

Flooding Issues Group (FIG), Workstreams BCCC meeting 14/04/2025 (15th update)

FIG Members

Community Councillors: John Bannerman (FIG coordinator), Richard Frimston

Associate Members: Tom Flynn, Lucile Verrot, Phil Benzie, Martin Ellison, John W Morrison

INTRODUCTION/History recap

On 31/12/2015 Ballater village like other communities in the NE of Scotland was badly flooded by Storm Frank, a storm rated by the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) as approximately a 1/200-year event. As a result of this flooding, Aberdeenshire council (ABCo) contracted a specialist company, RPS, to produce a feasibility study on the options to avoid a reoccurrence. This study concluded with a recommended option, 3A, which despite community objections, following Marr Area Committee approval, was submitted to Scottish Government (SG) for funding support in January 2020.

As of today (Apr 2025), although ABCo remain committed to 3A, no funding from SG has been forthcoming.

In 2020 as it became apparent that nothing was going to happen on the ground in the foreseeable future the Ballater and Crathie Community Council (BCCC) formed a subcommittee, the Flooding issues Group (FIG) to look at what could be done on the ground to progressively enhance the resilience of Ballater village to flooding.

Following the submission of 3A to SG, the BCCC position was to support 3A subject to the legitimate concerns of the community being addressed during the engineering phases. However, following a public meeting in April 2022 during which ABCo presented the process if funding from SG was forthcoming, the BCCC changed their position to oppose 3A since it became clear that it was highly unlikely that the legitimate concerns of the village could be addressed.

Interestingly, SEPA data shows that in the 5 years following Storm Frank, Ballater did not experience any river flows above approximately 400 cm/sec and subsequently no flooding. In the following 3 years, on 4 occasions, flows of more than 500 cm/sec have occurred with varying levels of flooding.

During one of these events (February 2021) the river permanently moved its course from Glen Muick towards the village. To determine the implications of this change ABCo contracted RPS to produce the Ballater additional Flood Study (BAFS). This study concluded that for high frequency low level flooding (1/30 year event), flooding would be worse in the village, but that for the low frequency high level flooding (1/200 year event) nothing had changed. To mitigate this increased risk the BAFS looked at several options with option 7 being the recommendation, the installation of a 440-meter 1.5-meter-high bund.

Since ABCo's position remains 3A they were not willing to fund option 7, but were willing to assist the community. A complete option 7 was beyond the means of the community, however after successful fund raising and support from several sources a partial option 7 was installed, the Hesco Box (HB) bund. This bund proved its worth in Jan 2024 when the village was dry at river flows which had previously caused flooding.

Progressively as FIG has reflected on this subject, we believe that with our changing climate not only is there an increasing risk of flooding but also increasing likelihood of extended periods of drought. To address these dual challenges of climate change we believe a catchment level approach is required.

To structure our work, we have developed and regularly updated a series of workstreams as explained below;

A. Preservation of Life

An emergency procedure has been written recognising our local fire and rescue team as the authority on the ground until Police Scotland arrive. The Ballater Resilience Group (BRG) are prepared to open the Victoria and Albert Halls as a rest centre if residents require to evacuate their homes following a specific Ballater flood warning.

Actions.

Update procedure to allow residents access to the sandbag container prior to a SEPA flood warning if there are concerns for flooding due to surface water, which may occur prior to a SPEA flood warning.

After a SEPA flood warning review the procedure with a few to continuous improvement.

John Bannerman

B. Promote Property Flood Resilience and Build back better

To maximise the resilience of a property to flooding there are 3 components, prevent water ingress, limit damage if water does enter and build back better following flooding.

The Scottish Flood Forum (SFF) have visited Ballater on several occasions and visited approximately 50 properties to give advice. Observations on the ground seem to confirm that homeowners are progressively taking responsibility for improving property flood resilience.

Actions.

Remain engaged with the SFF to capitalise on any support they can give to Ballater – John Morrison

Arrange a visit of the SFF flood mobile to Ballater in 2025 – John Morrison

Consider trying to quantify the uptake of PLP within the village – John Morrison

C. Oppose option 3A

At this stage, being successful in opposing 3A requires ABCo to withdraw the associated funding request.

While we believe funding is very unlikely to be forthcoming, if we can get 3A dropped it may be possible to reengage constructively with ABCo on what can be achieved locally with the support of the community.

Actions.

Liaise with Councillor Sarah Brown during the ABCo review of the flood risk management plan with the objective of having 3A dropped – Richard Frimston

D. HESCO BOX BUND

Moving forward the HB bund will require maintenance and there may be opportunities for enhancements (eg replacement of Shaun's bridge) which may be within the capacity of the community.

Actions.

Evaluate options for enhancements – John Bannerman

Consider planting willows to reinforce the bank in front of the bund. Liaise with the River Dee Trust who have experience in this area – Phil Benzie

E. CBEC STUDY

The stage 1 of the study has been completed and CBEC have identified 9 options which have the potential to increase the flooding resilience of Ballater village. These options are however qualitative. To quantify the potential of each option a mathematical model is being developed.

Actions.

Liaise with CBEC as required for the on the ground survey work related to the mathematical model – John Bannerman

Follow the progress of the development of the mathematical model (Budget / draft report / scope changes etc) – Tom Flynn

Main stakeholder consultation with CBEC input on which option/options to model in detail – FIG

Assuming a positive output from the detailed modelling CBEC to produce a design specification – CBEC

Request contractors quote – TBC

Present in a public meeting the way forward – FIG

Construction target 2026 - TBC

F. DEE RESILIENCE STRATEGY

Under the coordination of the Cairngorm National Park Authority a Dee Resilience strategy workgroup has been established. In the workgroup there are all the main stakeholders except for the key landowners however it is intended to address this soon since they are key to getting works down on the ground. Following several workshops all stakeholders are agreed that the objective for the river Dee in the face of a changing climate is to “Smooth the Flow” i.e. reduce the peaks (floods) and increase the troughs (droughts).

Actions.

Liaise with Braemar Community Council and Mid Deeside Community Council to speak with one voice – John Bannerman/Richard Frimston

Represent the 3 community councils in the Dee Resilience strategy workgroup – John Bannerman / Richard Frimston

G. FUND RAISING

As the CBEC study progresses funds will be required. Additionally, any future works associated with workstream D will require funding.

Actions.

Maintain an exhaustive list of all potential funders to be contacted when scope and costs of works becomes clear – Tom Flynn/Martin Ellison/Phil Benzie

In the event of successful fund raising ensure funders requirements are followed - TBC