

Hotwells and Cliftonwood Community Association
Statement to Bristol City Council Cabinet on
Agenda Item 15 Cabinet Meeting 23 January
Re Bristol Avon Flood Strategy

I welcome the opportunity to make this statement on behalf of our local communities.

In our opinion the Bristol Avon Flood Strategy does not present a fair assessment of flood risk and seems to favour development priorities over managing flood risk for our communities.

We consider that the Strategy presents data in a complex and restricted manner which misrepresents the flood risk to current homes resulting in unnecessary fear and anxiety. Specifically, we are concerned that the Strategy does not appear to take into account the following factors:

- The current space around Cumberland Basin and the Avon Cut, that can accommodate a significant proportion of the volume of excess water that comes through the Gorge during the peak tidal hour. A critical part of this would be lost if “flood walls” and the Western Harbour development (which would require them) were to proceed.
- Recent investments that have improved the resilience and effectiveness of gates, existing flood defences and/or the expert role of Harbour Service staff in operating measures that have successfully protected the City over the past century including in March 2020 (highest river level ever recorded) In January 2014 highest tidal level and back in 1990 (the biggest tidal surge).
- The current available capacity of the floating harbour. Lowering of the water level beforehand provides an estimated further 200,000m³ plus of space for excess water during the critical hour of an extreme tidal event.
- The potential overall increase in total residual flood risk (including of risk to life) that would result from the loss of current and future required space for water. This includes the higher risk exposure for existing communities from breaching or overtopping of the proposed raised flood defences and for the thousands of extra flood plain homes that the Strategy seeks to enable being built behind new flood defences around Cumberland Basin (and claims will fund a large part of the flood defence costs).

The Strategy itself notes that there were high levels of support for alternative measures to raised defences such as flood storage areas, working with nature or land management capture, but offers little in the way of evidence to suggest why it does not include these as part of the flood strategy, despite these measures being regarded as best practice. Rather it presents a Strategy based on a false dichotomy: “raised flood defences vs nothing”.

In summary we believe that the Bristol Avon Flood Strategy as presented does not represent a safe option for residents (present and future) living around the Floating Harbour and bypasses the experience and concerns of local residents in favour of a very specific development agenda.

Thank you

Rachel McNally - Chair Hotwells and Cliftonwood Community Association.