

## Thames Flood Forum (TFF) welcomes government proposals for stricter controls on building in the floodplain, with reservations.

On 22 February TFF members met a senior official from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) to discuss his Department's proposals reducing future flood risk by strengthening planning policies on development of the floodplain.

The stronger policies would require Councils to identify more precisely flood risk areas and specify what can be built on such land. They would also protect land required to drain water from flood risk areas. In some areas like parts of the Thames valley land free from significant flood risk is in very short supply. Proposals therefore set conditions for exception from the new regime. Councils would be required to consult the Environment Agency on significant planning applications in flood risk areas. If Councils wish to grant planning applications contrary to Environment Agency advice ODPM approval would be required.

Thames Flood Forum members welcomed the new policies in principle because of their clarity and potential to reduce the number of properties being built in the flood plain. They also recognised that although the new policies were stricter they still gave communities flexibility to secure development plans that appropriate to their needs. However members were worried by practical details. With no new money on offer Councils would find it difficult to make the required risk assessments fast enough to avoid blight and disruption. Some of the terms used in the new policies needed to be defined even more clearly if developers, Councils and the Environment Agency were to work together efficiently.

At the end of the "Man from the Ministry" commented that the meeting had been 'useful for him in finalising the guidance'. He added that his Department hoped to launch the new policies in the summer of 2006.

The next meeting of the Thames Flood Forum will be at 1830 in the Civic Offices Addlestone on 17th May 2006. Details of issues for discussion will be announced at the beginning of May.

### Notes for Editors

1. Government proposals are set out in "Consultation on Planning Policy Statement 25: Development and Flood

Risk." Available online via [www.odpm.gov.uk](http://www.odpm.gov.uk) or in hard copy, free of charge, from ODPM Publications on **0870 1226 236** quoting product code 05 PD 03509

2. The new policies would designate 3 flood risk zones;
  - a. The medium probability zone, likely to be flooded more often than once in a thousand years but less every hundred years.
  - b. The high probability zone likely to flood more often than once in a hundred years.
  - c. The functional flood plain also likely to flood more often than once in a hundred years but required to be kept open in order to drain flood water from other areas.

The new policies would also define the types of development normally appropriate to each zone. For example housing would be allowed in the medium probability zone unless it was adapted for use by the elderly, but buildings for the emergency services and hospitals would not be built. Very little building would normally be allowed on the functional flood plain.

3. For further information please contact Forum Chairman, Tom Crossett on **01273 473 565**.

The Thames Flood Forum is a voluntary group that brings together organizations with an interest in reducing flood risk in areas adjacent to the Thames and its tributaries between Hurley and Teddington including Local Authorities, Community Groups, the Environment Agency and other stakeholders. The Forum aims to promote flood risk reduction by better mutual understanding of flood risk issues and options for their management. Membership is open to any organization that shares the Forum's interests, subject to approval by the Chairman who is accountable to the current membership for his decisions. Anyone can attend its meeting as an observer. Forum resources are provided by local authorities and the Environment Agency. The Forum is currently chaired by an independent scientist, Tom Crossett. The current acting Forum Secretary, John Godden of Runnymede BC will provide details of current membership, terms of reference and future meetings. John can be contacted at Runnymede BC Offices, Civic Centre, Station Road, Addlestone KT15 2AH or [john.godden@runnymede.gov.uk](mailto:john.godden@runnymede.gov.uk).