



The flood risk manager from the Environment Agency, Barry Russell, with Richard Benyon, and Piers Allison, of Bucklebury village flood team

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# MP promises better flood preparation next time

## Benyon pledges that spending cuts will not put vulnerable householders at risk

**NEWBURY MP Richard Benyon has vowed that the country would be better prepared for floods this year despite the deepening cuts in public spending.**

The MP, who is also the government minister responsible for waterways and flooding, made the pledge when he visited flood prevention works in Bucklebury recently.

The residents of Bucklebury have teamed up with the Environment Agency and West Berkshire Council to improve protection against flooding and prevent a repeat of the devastation caused in 2007, when 24 homes

Report by Eddie van der Walt

and the village hall were flooded, in addition to the catastrophic damage caused by heavy rainfall in other parts of the district.

The work in Bucklebury will include building flood bunds, digging a bypass channel and developing a new ford to divert flood flows and will mainly be funded by the Regional Flood Defence Committee – represented by local authorities, Defra and the Environment Agency – with contributions from the villagers and West Berkshire Council.

The overall cost of the scheme is £600,000 and will protect 25 homes and the village hall.

Mr Benyon, who recently visited the site where the work is being carried out, said: “This is an example of co-operation between the community, the Environment Agency, the landowner and the farmer, and I am using this as an example to other places which I am visiting around the county.”

Asked how government budget cuts would affect the preparations for adverse weather in the future, Mr Benyon said: “Any scheme that is

under way will continue and we are going to spend £2.1bn on flood defences: that is a massive amount.

“It is about eight per cent less than last year, but I don’t even think people will notice the difference. I think we will be better prepared this year than last year.”

However, Mr Benyon’s words may not be enough to alleviate the fears of those whose homes have been destroyed by severe flooding in recent years, as many people across England who have claimed on their insurance against the damage have since said they have been denied further coverage by their insurance companies, while others have seen large increases in their premiums.

When questioned what action Mr Benyon was taking on this, he said that he had raised the issue with British Association of Insurers during his regular meetings with it.

He added: “A lot of effort has been made and a great deal of money has been spent to ensure that people’s houses will be safe.

“The difficulty we have with insurers is that in many cases people who have previously been the victims of flooding have been unable to get their properties insured.

“This is a national problem. If I do come across cases like this, I write to the insurer to inform them of the extensive work that has been carried out to safeguard the houses and in some cases I have had success in having their decisions reviewed.”

# Firm launches ‘Middleton tour’

A HAMPSHIRE travel firm is planning coach tours taking in local sights in Bucklebury frequented by Kate Middleton and her fiancé, Prince William.

Mortons Travel has confirmed that the company’s New Year tours may include stop-off points at, for example, the Bladebone Inn, Bucklebury – one of several village spots known to have been visited by the newly engaged couple, who plan to tie the knot in the spring.

Mortons spokeswoman Ros Funnell said that they catered for many American visitors likely to be interested in visiting the Chapel Row and Bucklebury area, where Kate Middleton was brought up:

She added: “It’s also something our older

clientele might like to do – to drive along and see where our future Queen might have been brought up.”

Mortons, Mrs Funnell pointed out, even had historic family connections with Bucklebury.

She said: “My son’s great, great, great grandfather was John Morton, a farmer pastor in Bucklebury in 1835.”

John Morton, she explained, championed a Parliamentary Act of Enclosure which had ensured that Bucklebury Common remained as common land over the centuries.

“Without him, the Middletons - or anyone else, would not have been able to live on Bucklebury Common,” said Mrs Funnell.



Mortons driver Ed Jeffery outside the Bladebone Inn

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