

Chapter 5 Re-building social life

“Yesterday it rained quite bad and I was coming in and the drain at the front is blocked and that was starting to fill and do you know, when you think, I’d just walk away and I don’t know what I’d do, I’d rather just set fire to the house, walk away and just never come back I think. I couldn’t do it again.”

Abby, resident
Interview, January 2008

“We’ve actually started a Resident’s Association for all of the area. I think we are currently about eighty strong and we are actually working with the council, the Environment Agency, the water authority and we are trying to get something sorted so that this will never happen again. And so the residents can feel confident when they are living in their house especially, all of us when we move back in, we can feel confident that this is not going to happen. We are not going to wake up one morning and it be flooded, we are not going to have to come home one day and it be flooded again.”

Amy, resident
Interview, November 1st 2007

If we want to understand the flood recovery process it follows that we need to think about just what it is that is being recovered. We have already shown that describing recovery as a process with a clear end point where there is a return to how things were before the flood is misleading. However, what we show in this chapter are the accounts of diarists as they try to rebuild social life. Our argument is that flood recovery needs not only to refer to the repairs of the home and surrounding built environment, but to a sense of home, the community and trust in the future. This is the focus of this chapter, the re-building of social life as part of the recovery process. We deal with each in turn – rebuilding a sense of home, changed community relations and a changed sense of the future.

5.1 A sense of home

To understand the recovery process we have to start with an understanding of what it is that people are recovering from. We have already shown that the flood event itself is not the key problem facing householders. However, how the subsequent impact on the home is managed is a central theme to the different experiences that unfold.

5.1.1 The repair process

In Section 3.2.2 we outlined the sense of despair that many diarists experienced as their homes were ‘stripped out’ However, during the repairs process itself, diarists experienced mixed and conflicting emotions towards their homes. This often manifested itself in a compulsion to ‘be there’ in their homes as much as possible (and feeling bereft when away from them), while at the same time experiencing a

strong sense of fear and revulsion on seeing the devastation that had occurred. Indeed, many diarists also saw their homes as a reflection of themselves, with some people feeling shamed and embarrassed by the state of their house during the repairs.

“I got immune to the smell, I couldn’t smell it and then every now and then I would say, ‘Oh that smells there’” I would just get a whiff of it, I’d go out and I’d come in and [I wondered if] people would come and [think] it was right mucky... It’s so embarrassing. ‘Is she mucky?’ You know, I’m not, I wasn’t brought up in a mucky house and I’d never lived in a mucky house, I wouldn’t, because it doesn’t cost nought to clean, to keep things clean and that.”

Suzanne, resident
Interview, 20th December 2007

Other, difficult feelings related to the sense of invasion and loss of control experienced when your home becomes somebody else’s workplace. This was particularly difficult for those who felt unable to trust the workmanship or integrity of their builders. As described in the case studies below, diarists sometimes suspected that something was amiss but felt that they lacked the skills and knowledge to question what had been done (for more on this see Section 4.2). Amy explained:

“It’s a trip everyday just to make sure everything is OK... and you get a chance to see what’s happening. Sometimes you wished you hadn’t, when it’s in the middle of a job it can be quite frightening to see what’s happened to your house. It was where you felt secure, it was your special space that you could shut the door and remove yourself from everything. And at the moment it’s been invaded by people that you wouldn’t normally have there.”

Amy, resident
Interview, November 1st 2007

For Amy, this metaphor of ‘invasion’ was significant. She felt that the building work had transformed her ‘special space’ – where she had control over the people and objects that were allowed entry – into somewhere that she didn’t want to be anymore and where unknown, sometimes uninvited, tradesmen and technologies had control. Overnight, it was as if her home had become a building site – someone else’s workplace where she was a visitor not a resident. Poor workmanship was also experienced as disrespect to their home. This was not only the case with builders whose work was of a poor standard – residents also reported workmen leaving litter and cigarette ends all over the house, losing keys to the property, leaving windows open at night and making a mess when using the bathroom.

As outlined in the previous chapter, Amy’s example showed how problems of poor workmanship often arise because the builders consider themselves as having a contract with the insurance company, rather than the residents themselves (see Box 15). This left diarists feeling marginalized and powerless to complain, especially when people were unsure as to how much their insurance claim was for. Indeed, many people said that they had never seen a copy of the surveyor’s report or reinstatement schedule and, as a result, they were unclear about what work was meant to be being carried out:

Laura When your property is finished... you should have like a chartered surveyor or somebody come along and go, 'that's been done and that's been done'.
 Olivia We said that in one of our diaries, we'd really like somebody independent to check all the work because we don't know what we should have put up with. We put that in a diary.

Group discussion, July 17th

"Really everyone round this table should have had a reinstatement schedule for their properties, detailing [what needs doing]... So really you could use that as a tick list to say 'has that job been done?'"

Bruce, resident

Group discussion, July 17th

"I asked 'will I ever know how much they've been paid?' because I want the insurance company to say 'is it worth that?'"

Laura, resident

Group discussion, July 17th

Having no confidence in the workmanship conducted on their homes and being excluded from vital information about their claim and repairs left householders feeling powerless to challenge the various companies coming into their properties. Unsurprisingly, this also left them with a heightened sense of anxiety about the future.

5.1.2 From a house to a home

As section 3.4 (on recovery trajectories) highlighted, the difficulties don't end when the repairs are finished. Living with a 'house' that has just 'arrived' and where everything is new, rather than a home that has been built up gradually and where particular objects have memories and meanings attached to them, can be very difficult psychologically. It is as if the home – which grows, as it does, with its inhabitants – becomes a reference point for individuals and families, and the result of living in it and working on it over the years leads to a stamp of individuality that makes it unique and special to the people concerned. However, when this is stripped away overnight the home becomes a house, a blank canvas and the inhabitants struggle to recover its meaning over time.

These feelings of loss and strangeness seemed to be particularly acute for older people who had long memories of family life in their homes. For example, as described previously (p.45) Sophie's mother-in-law would often sit in her bedroom because this was the one part of the house that remained as it had done before the floods. By contrast, the downstairs of her house, which was new and modern, felt alien to her. Also, it was not only the décor, fixtures and fittings that people missed – particular household items, such as baking trays or recipe books handed down through generations were mourned as part of a link to life pre-flood that could never be recaptured.

"I was always baking, I mean I've always cooked and baked. I had about twelve recipe books, good ones as well. And every one of them went. If I wanted to do something fancy, I can't remember, I've no books left, I've nothing left, it's all gone. And even my

baking tins... they were stainless steel and they were good but of course they were all under water in the kitchen and all the mess. And I had no water; I couldn't clean them so I had to dump them. We were just talking about baking for Christmas, I said, "We'll have a job making some mince pies because I haven't got no trays".

Betty, resident
Interview, 19th December 2007

The task of turning the finished house into a home is not so *straightforward*. Tasks such as shopping for things for the home became hard to bear after the floods – often despite the fact that residents were being told by their insurance companies to go out and source new items to replace what was lost. As Abby described:

"There's still a lot of hard work to come, there's still got furniture to go and pick and argue over, because you do don't you, do you know? We've realised like the stupidest of things, we argue over and then we are like months picking something because, and we'll go round and round and round and round and just argue over something that we are picking because I think we need it to be so perfect this time. There can't be nothing that we are buying, I don't like that because we can't afford to do that and we want it to be special. We don't want to go through all this and it not feel nice and like home. And I think that's like a big pressure on you because you think, no I've gone through that, totally stripped out and have it like I don't want it. I think it's just you can't bear any more stress so it's got to be perfect or not at all, there's no like in between, no. Because it's just stress"

Abby, resident
Interview, January 2008

Each purchase involves multiple forms of effort: the emotional effort of reimagining your home in your mind (which is particularly difficult when you have no point of reference) and the physical effort of going out and sourcing it. There is also the emotional frustration involved in having to manage the conflicts that choosing items may generate. Trying to reassert your individuality on your home can be difficult as, with every flooded household having to choose new things at the same time – often from a limited range of stockists – many people end up with houses that look very similar as Melanie reflected in her diary:

"We have started to pick our colour schemes for all the rooms, the only problem is everyone's house we have been in that has been flooded has got the same colour scheme browns and creams! Either we all have good taste or bad taste!"

Melanie, resident
Diary, February 4th 2008

Add to this a pervading sense of anxiety and insecurity in case the floods happen again (see p.102), and it is unsurprising that many residents continue to feel ill at ease in their new homes for some time after they have moved back in, as described in the box overleaf.

Box 21 From a home to a house

A 'home' is more than just a place where you live, and more than just an investment. It is a place that is built up gradually over time to provide a living record of the family life that has gone on within its walls and, as such, it performs a variety of functions from the physical to the emotional and the symbolic, as the following discussion shows:

- Amy: You've heard on radio interviews and things like that, people ringing up and talking on the shows that were going on throughout the year, saying people have been flooded, you get this nice new home and you get possessions.
- Isobel: "Aren't you lucky you get a nice new home?" – I blow when someone says that to me.
- Amy: I had a nice home before it started, I didn't need any of this.
- Isobel: Exactly.
- Amy: It doesn't feel like home though does it?
- Jan: A home is something you build up gradually.
- THEY TALK OVER EACH OTHER
- Amy: Yes you do it gradually don't you?
- Isobel: You have to choose and you don't know what you want do you?
- Amy: I went into a furniture shop four times when I was looking at suites because I could not face walking round looking at them. So a lot of people must have gone through that.
- Abby: It's the shopping, every day it's like looking on the Internet, just trying to replace things.
- Amy: You've also said about it that it's not a home, yes we had a nice home before and it was ours and we'd worked for it. And we've got downstairs replaced, we've got things replaced upstairs, we've got a brand new kitchen, which I'm sure walking in would say this is absolutely gorgeous. But it's not ours; we've not built it up like we did before. It's arrived.
- Leanne: Well mine is beginning to feel like home now, I do feel like I'm back at home. But I don't value it the same. I don't have the same sense of value and I feel very, very insecure. Now when you are in your home you should feel secure and content, and I don't have those feelings...
- Abby: We are not valuing it.
- Amy: It's not just that, it's the thought is in the back of your mind, is it going to happen again?
- Isobel: Exactly.

Group discussion, April 24th 2008

For some diarists taking part in the study, the floods, though traumatic and disruptive, provided a positive opportunity to make a new start. For example, Emily, who was in her 80s, had remarried following the death of her first husband. She was able to see a more positive side to the flooding as the repairs process meant that she and her new husband were able to redesign their home together. This was in contrast to the pre-flood situation where the house they shared had been designed by Emily and her first husband:

- Emily: When we got married five years ago, Norman moved in with me. So it was kind of my house and my husband's house and now I hope that he will, he's never said it, he's never complained about this at all.
- Norman: There's no need.

Emily: I want it now to be things that he's chosen in the house.
Norman: So the kitchen design, you've left largely to me haven't you? So I've had some input into the new things, that's the positive thing that we are going to have virtually a new house. Not that we crave for worldly possessions but we've got to have them in some form or other. So it's really going to be nice I think when it's finished.

Emily & Norman, residents
Interview, January 2008

Emily's story is the clearest example of situations where people have been able to extract some positives from the flooding. However, other examples of this process at work were also evident from the accounts of younger diarists who reported that the floods had acted as an incentive for them to change or improve their homes in some way. For example, some residents chose to pay a bit extra to get additional improvements made while they had the disruption from the builders anyway. Melanie and her family had always wanted a more open plan living area downstairs, so they asked their builders not to replace one of the internal walls that had been taken down. They also took the opportunity of being in a rented house to pay extra and have a new bathroom installed upstairs. Such positive changes in no way compensated for the overall stress, anxiety and disruption resulting from the floods but her example does illustrate some of the more positive ways in which people responded to an otherwise very difficult set of circumstances regarding their homes.

5.1.3 Summary

Flood recovery is about rebuilding a sense of home. It is, as our diarist accounts show, not about returning to 'normality' because that appears to be impossible. For some the process is indeed positive, they gain more than they lose. However, for others, the impact of the floods on the home is as much about the management of repair, or rather in the first instance destruction, as it is about the entry of 'bad' water into the home. The loss of home results from 'the strip out', during which the material fabric of the house and the key objects and routines associated with it are swept away, and the home is turned into a building site. The difficulties involved in this process are exacerbated when there are no checks on the standards of workmanship and builders treat the home as just another job that doesn't really matter. Rebuilding the home is also not as easy as moving back in. It involves sourcing new household belongings and learning to live in a new internal environment where memories have been stripped away and a new sense of connection to the home must be built from scratch. Diarists explained that a home is something that you build up gradually and this process, like everything else about flood recovery, takes time.

5.2 A sense of community

Disasters such as flooding do not just affect individual households but the wider community. And indeed, the very nature of 'home' is something that is in part about the place of home i.e. the neighborhood.

5.2.1 Responding to the crisis

Interestingly, and as with other disasters, initial interviews with residents suggested that strong networks of support existed – or developed quickly – in the affected communities to help people cope with the unfolding disaster. The stories we heard were all about people “pulling together” and doing what they could to help their neighbours. Cecil felt that “it was just like the spirit during the wartime”, while Barbara, a council tenant living on a large housing estate said: “I suppose in this little community we all pull together and basically help each other”.

Residents also spoke of helping and supporting each other throughout much of the repairs process. For many diarists, this meant speaking to (or even becoming close friends with) neighbours they had not previously spoken to, as Nigel and Anna described:

- Anna: Most people in the area you know, the immediate neighbours we did know because people do leave keys with us if they go on holiday or anything because they've got burglar alarms and you have to have a key don't you? But people from, you know, a little bit further, who we've just nodded to, everybody stops and do come and talk to you now. And I find that it did bring a closeness, you know.
- Nigel: Well eight of us all went to the Canaries, we all went to the Canaries, we called it the flood party in the Canaries!

Group discussion, April 24th 2008

For others, this meant attempting to recreate some kind of social space where neighbours could meet and talk. Isobel and her husband lived upstairs during the repairs process and, because most of the rest of the street decided to move out, this meant that Isobel's house became a kind of drop-in centre for neighbours coming to visit their properties:

“I think the biggest thing that has kept us going is the fact that in the first few weeks all our neighbours were backwards and forwards. I think literally because they couldn't let go... it was just the case that they felt they needed to be here. We've stood for ages and ages outside talking to them all and loads of them have been in here, I mean it's been a soup kitchen some days in here you know, making goodness knows how many cups of tea and such like... It's been standing room only. But I think that is the one thing that's kept us going, we seem to be closer somehow to our neighbours and the fact that they are in the same boat carries you along.”

Isobel, resident

Group discussion, April 24th 2008

As noted in the final chapter of this report, a key problem is the existence of the ‘recovery gap’ where diarists are left with little or no formal support once the immediate emergency response phase has been completed. Diarists report that the most effective support they received during this time came from family, friends and neighbours as well as informal sources operating at the level of the local community – for example, those offered by local churches or community centres. One possible reason for this is the fact that these sources often provided a quicker, more flexible response than some of the larger, more bureaucratic sources of help available, which took longer to mobilise and which were less responsive to

the very unique needs of flooded residents. Crucially, those who supported friends and neighbours also understood the importance of providing quick and practical help to those in difficulty. This is in contrast to a common criticism voiced by many diarists, which was that the city council required them to fill in a form before any assistance could be given.

Box 22 The support available from community groups

During her interview, Helen explained how the residents' group that she and her friend were members of had responded to help neighbours during the floods:

- Helen: Our community group has been absolutely fantastic.
Elham: Is it something that's been going for a long time?
Helen: Oh it's been going for years... There's only seven of us on it and we all mucked in together to try and help people, when the floods happened, tried to find out different things for them, who to contact, getting hold of different Hull City Council people to come down to see people's houses, mainly the pensioners and the disabled people and that. We tried to do everything we can to possibly help or get information or telephone numbers for them to get in contact with people.
Elham: So did you go and visit people?
Helen: Yes we went round to people's houses, knocking on doors, asking them how they was getting on, is there anything that we could do you know, to help them or help them to get in contact with people.
Elham: And were these people you knew already?
Helen: Yes, they are people that we know round here you know, neighbours, friends, because like I say, I mean I've lived here twenty-five years, I know the people in this area. I know the people in the bungalows, the pensioners... You get to know them over the years.
Elham: So you knew them already?
Helen: Yes and we just went round to see what we could do, what we could help them with, how soon we could get contractors you know, to come in or get work done, even if it was just doors on or things like that, heaters and stuff like that for them. We just did what we could. I mean a lot of times we got knocked back by the council because they got fed up of us ringing up and asking.
Elham: Do you think if you hadn't done that those people wouldn't have had the help?
Helen: I don't think they would because I mean we found out by ourselves that we wasn't getting the help so we just put our own feelings aside, even though I was going through the same state as the other people, we thought we'd try and help them because a lot of them were a lot older than me.
Elham: Yes, and on their own.
Helen: And on their own, exactly like me. I mean, I know I could come back home and I've got my family but some of them haven't got family or if they have got family they don't hear from their families very often.

Helen, resident
Interview, January 2008

Interestingly, Helen was a pensioner herself as well as being registered disabled as a result of a long-term illness. However, despite this, she did not consider herself as being particularly vulnerable because she was primarily concerned for the needs of others who she felt needed more assistance.

While some of these actions built on existing community ties and forms of solidarity, new support networks also developed. For example, Amy and her neighbours started a residents' association that now works with the council and the Environment Agency in a bid to get action on flooding related issues, while Karen, who had always run community projects as part of her job, found that the floods prompted a new enthusiasm for these kinds of efforts in her community:

“I had people knocking on my door all the time, sort of residents, “What can we do to help?” And that just didn't happen before the floods in this area, and people when they knew what I did for a job said, “You're mad, why do you work for the community?” And now people are being amazing, absolutely amazing in terms of they want to set up residents' associations, neighbourhood watches, fun days and this kind of thing.”

Karen, resident and worker
Interview, January 2008

Interestingly the diarists' experiences appeared to help them identify with distant communities affected by disasters in ways that they had not appreciated before. For example, Isobel was reflecting in her diary on a telephone conversation that she had had with one of her best friends. She felt that her friend was unable to understand the severity of what had happened because she had not seen or experienced floods for herself, and this made her reflect on how her own experiences led her to feel an empathy with people affected by the Burmese cyclone:

“I don't think she [my friend] really understands exactly what we have gone through. The trouble is she lives 2hrs away from us and has only seen the house very briefly once in all the time we have been getting sorted. I know myself if I see anything like this on TV I feel very sympathetic towards them but am guilty of 'out of sight.' We just are not in touch with the real picture. I must admit the earthquake in China & cyclone in Burma does haunt me and makes me think we got off very lightly.”

Isobel, resident
Diary, May 12th 2008

Interestingly, as described in Section 2.3 and Box 2, the methods used for this research project also ended up creating a new community network within which diarists were able to help and support each other and campaign for action on flood-related issues.

5.2.2 Emerging tensions across the community

While the flood created communities and brought people together in the short to medium term, longer-term changes suggest that divisions and tensions were also created. One concern expressed by diarists was the fear that neighbours would move out of the area and that rental communities would develop, leading to a change in the character of the area:

Amy: That's the other thing with communities though. We talked at the beginning about great community spirit and whatever but because as you said, the house prices, we've lost money in, people who do decide to go on who are going to sell at a loss, who have made their mind up that they are going to

- leave and they can't cope with it, you are going to get people who are developers, you are going to get people who are going to buy to rent it out because other people are not at the moment going to take the chance of taking a house on in this area. So you are going to start getting rental communities, which changes the whole environment.
- Isobel: It does.
- Amy: We ended up in a rental community when we moved out into a rental house and all the houses in that area were all buy to rent, you didn't talk to your neighbours. We were there eight months and we sort of said, "Hello". And that was about it, we had no idea what they were called, they'd no idea what we were called.
- Isobel: Also they don't necessarily do improvements do they? They do enough to make it nice enough to live in but they don't may be do anything major that's going to benefit you in the long run because they may not be there in the long run.

Group discussion, April 24th 2008

Amy's fears about rental communities reflect the very specific experiences that she had whilst out of her home. We are not therefore trying to claim that rental communities are less neighbourly or caring about their homes than owner occupiers (indeed, all three of the private renters taking part in our study had formed strong attachments to their homes and completed some renovations on them as they anticipated living there for the foreseeable future). It is also too early to tell if owner occupiers really will be replaced by private renters on a large scale across Hull and what effect, if any, the credit crisis may have on this trend. However, this is an important question to consider because, as outlined in Section 3.3, our study found private renters to be particularly vulnerable to the impacts of flood recovery. A worst case scenario would therefore be that inequalities widen in residential areas across Hull with wealthier residents moving out of high flood risk areas and poorer, more transient and vulnerable communities remaining in areas where insurance – and peace of mind – are hard to come by.

However, diarists were also concerned about other, significant changes that were already taking place within their social landscapes. Isobel's comments about her friend's inability to understand her suffering hints at the divide that appears to have developed in many cases between those who were flooded and those who were not. The divide between flooded and non-flooded residents was exacerbated by comments from those unaffected by the disaster, suggesting that flooded households were "lucky" to have got a "new" house and possessions:

"Went to Bruce's friends this morning.
 Feel really mad and confused over [friend's] comments!
 'At least your house will all be done up and you won't have to pay for it. I wish we could have done that. I'll swap you!'
 How stupid to say something like that. Aaaaarrgh I feel so mad I wanted to scream at her 'you don't know what it's like having your home destroyed by something you can't control. You try and upset your family environment on purpose and see how it feels'
 I bit my tongue and quietly asked Bruce if we could leave."

Olivia, resident
 Diary, 23rd September 2007

“We got our new car in the August, I mean Christ the house hadn’t even been stripped out or anything, someone in the playground, and they were flooded actually, they said to [husband], ‘You’ve got your flood money’. And [husband] was so upset by it you know, he said, ‘Flood money? What flood money? We haven’t got anything – we haven’t even started [the repairs] yet – we were buying the car anyway!’”

Michaela, resident and worker
Group discussion, September 25th 2008

Within the flooded community, divisions also occurred between different parts of the city, with residents from places such as West Hull and Orchard Park feeling ignored in comparison to Bransholme and Kingswood which, they claimed, got all the assistance and all the media coverage:

Marion: Don’t take this the wrong way... or anything but there’s been nothing for us. Orchard Park has just been wiped off the face; there’s been no coverage about Orchard Park and what we’ve had to go through.

Caroline: I’ve seen Kingswood, Bilton.

Marion: Yes, Kingswood, Bransholme, yes, but where’s Orchard Park when all this was going on? Where are we?... There’s been nothing about Orchard Park. I don’t like Orchard Park myself but you’ve got to live somewhere don’t you?

Marion, resident
Group discussion, July 17th

Other divisions opened up between the insured and the uninsured as residents with insurance felt that those without had been rewarded for non-payment of premiums by ‘free’ handouts and high levels of assistance. On estates where there was a mix of tenures diarists reported resentments arising between council tenants and owner occupiers as the ways in which both parties were treated during the repairs process varied greatly. Even on streets that did not have these divisions, residents reported a shift in feelings as the months went by so that what had originally been a friendly and supportive atmosphere transformed into a ‘business as usual’ scenario where people began to go ‘back into their shells’ once the repairs had been completed and where disputes began to arise between neighbours over issues such as misuse of skips and workmen parking on verges:

“There’s also been the bad cases, like my neighbours across the road from here, the caravan side. They had arguments with their neighbours because of the caravan blocking the sun because she couldn’t sunbathe. And it was like, that’s horrible. And other people’s tow bars in the front gardens from the caravans, having an inch in somebody’s gardens, kicking off, and stuff like that.”

Karen, resident and worker
Interview, September 24th 2008

It is therefore important to be aware of the ways in which the floods – and the subsequent repairs process – can divide as well as unite communities.

5.2.3 Summary

These examples show how disasters do not simply create or destroy communities – instead, we can see how they reshape the social and physical landscapes of the community as the web of allegiances shift

throughout the recovery process. It therefore makes no sense to talk about the home or community returning to its previous state because although certain former feelings and activities may be resumed given time, this must be balanced against the fact that individuals, homes and communities have changed in multiple and sometimes conflicting directions as a result of what has happened to them. While, for some diarists, this meant becoming closer to neighbours, others found that frictions also developed over the longer-term as divisions developed between flooded and non-flooded residents, between different parts of the city, the insured and uninsured and the different tenure types. Diarists also discussed the possibility that long-term residents would move out of flooded areas, thus prompting a change to rental communities who may be more vulnerable to the effects of flood recovery. In short, what we are witnessing is a readjustment – rather than a return *per se* – to a new and altered set of circumstances.

5.3 A sense of the future

The floods presented a challenge to the ways in which people understood and talked about the future. Optimistic trust in the future is of course key to the basis of social life and, unsurprisingly, many of the diarists felt particularly anxious during periods of bad weather. Their anxieties about a repeat of the flooding were driven largely by their beliefs about what caused the events of June 2007 and whether these issues were being resolved. Some cited climate change as being responsible, but others felt that institutional culpability was more the issue. This led to extensive discussions about infrastructure management, with diarists calling for a single body to be made responsible for overseeing the maintenance of the drainage system. They also felt that their local knowledge should be consulted and used to inform decisions made around drainage management. Finally, issues of personal contingency plans and resilient homes were discussed, with diarists holding a range of viewpoints, from those who had already formulated plans to those who felt there was nothing they could do to protect their homes.

5.3.1 Anxiety from rain

Perhaps unsurprisingly, many diarists experienced anxiety long after moving back into their homes. For some, this anxiety was little more than a nagging feeling of discontent that formed a background to their daily lives. For others, much stronger feelings, along with particular actions and behaviours, came to the fore during heavy rain. For example, Amy and Leanne both spoke about checking drains as they walked their dogs, while Jan would watch the particular spot in her front garden where she knew the water would start to pool first.

Box 23 “When it rains I feel helpless”: Bruce’s story

Bruce, a married man in his 30s with two young children, was flooded twice – once on June 15 and once on June 25. The fact that two floods had occurred in such quick succession was a major cause for concern for Bruce. He did some research into his local area and discovered that his street had a previous history of flooding and this made him very anxious about the future. To try and allay his anxiety, he

Box continued overleaf

signed up to the Environment Agency's Floodline, developed a household plan to try and protect his belongings (for example, storing the children's toys in boxes so that they could be easily moved upstairs in the event of a flood) and made some changes to his property, including having soakaways installed in his garden. However, his experience of being flooded twice and his awareness of the impacts of those floods made him profoundly uneasy and he developed what he described as an almost obsessional preoccupation with watching the weather forecast. If the forecast was for sunshine, he would relax but, if rainfall was predicted, it was a completely different story and his fears surfaced with a vengeance during the downpour of January 2008, as this extended sequence from his diary reveals.

15th January 2008

Switched on the TV, this morning (06:00hrs - up early due to baby) and the news media coverage was showing flooded roads, which only brings back your memories and worst fears of what happened.

I try all day to dispel the thoughts from my mind, but I think that I've become too concerned with the whole issue.

16th January 2008

Local flood warnings have been issued!! My worst fear.

My anxiety levels are high, don't know whether to go in to work or not - but go in the end. I listen to the local radio bulletins on my mobile phone.

The weather forecast for the on coming few days is for more rain!

17th January 2008

The day starts with rain and ends with rain - no real breaks. When it rains I feel helpless, it's the unknowing of what is happening but also the knowing of what could happen - if this makes any sense.

18th January 2008

The weather forecast for the on coming few days is for more rain and for it to be heavy. Just feel on edge and unable to relax

19th January 2008

The local newspaper predicts extreme rainfall of 25 to 30mm. I know that the average monthly rainfall is 50mm, so the outlook not good at all. Just feel incredibly numb to the whole thing. Unless you've lived through it, I don't think that anyone can comprehend the emotions that you travel through from the flood itself, the moving to temporary accommodation, the hassles with loss adjusters, sourcing builders, chasing them, project managing the whole reinstatement of your home. I don't want to live through this again!

The rain level predicted is the same that flooded my home on the 15th June 2007, so I know what to expect.

20th January 2008

Becoming quite concerned, rang the local authority for sand bags, even though it's a Sunday they have the staff working, so I know that they are taking the whole scenario seriously.

Not feeling confident for the next couple of days.

14:18hrs - received an automated telephone call from the Environment Agency detailing localised flooding - our district is stated. The nightmare and fear intensifies. Make the decision with my spouse to move items upstairs to be on the safe side.

21st January 2008

Heavy rainfall over night has just added to already saturated gardens, end up having to bail out bucket loads, upon bucket loads of water from the rear garden. This started from 04:30hrs.

Box continued overleaf

06:45hrs - rang work to say that I was on flood watch. My concern is the rear garden and the fact that the rainfall is so heavy that the area could flood once more.

07:30hrs - put the new sofas up on bricks in the lounge. Looking at the road at the front of the house where it flooded previously - but the waters are draining away - so far so good.

13:00hrs - my father and wife call by at lunch with a hot sandwich, not stopped moving water all morning, my first break.

Physically and mentally drained - bad joke and the wrong terminology but hey you must still have a sense of humour, if it wasn't for that, you would crack up.

The garden has heavy clay under it, so the water table was high from the continuous rains over the past week.

Finally finish removing buckets of water and call it a night at 19.00hrs.

22nd January 2008

Back to work. I don't think that anyone has any understanding of how I felt and why I did what I had to do yesterday.

When you are a father and husband, you have to defend your property and belongings for the sake of your siblings and spouse. I had to defend my property to the best of my ability, as I couldn't think about or endure a further six months away from home.

I still say home, loosely, as I still don't feel that the home we have ended up with is ours, I still feel detached from it, as though it's not ours. This is a feeling that I've had from the beginning.

The weather forecast for the forthcoming week is encouraging, so feel slightly more relaxed than I have over the past one.

Bruce's story creates a strong sense of powerlessness. His anxiety is reflected in his feelings of detachment – both from his surroundings and also from his colleagues when he returns to work – and the fact that, in his entry of the 19th, he begins to imagine once more the horrors of dealing with the floods of June 2007.

5.3.2 Anxiety about the cause of flood

A strong sense of anxiety during heavy rain was shared by many diarists. However, it was not the only perspective. When asked about the threat of future flooding, diarists exhibited a broad range of views, from those who were certain that a repeat disaster was not far away to those who felt they would not see a similar incident in their lifetimes. This diversity of views was underpinned by people's beliefs about what had caused the June 2007 event. As described previously, the Independent Review Body's official report into the causes and consequences of the floods concluded that the capacity of the drainage system was overwhelmed by the sheer volume of rainfall (Coulthard *et al.* 2007a; Coulthard *et al.* 2007b). However, diarists' local knowledge led to a host of other explanations – all of which had implications for their feelings about the future. For example, as described previously, Betty and Chris were so worried about a repeat of the floods that they made the decision to exchange the lease on their bungalow for one on a first floor flat within the same housing scheme. The reason for their anxiety was that they were using their own personal knowledge of river levels – gleaned through a long history of living and working in the area – to assess the future threat from climate change:

Chris: I was with the Fire Brigade at one time and I was on the Fire Bus for a period, going back lots of years. But I'm used to the Humber as you see

with your own eyes and... we were shopping to get some stuff for here [at] St. Andrew's Dock, which was, is now a big shopping area right on the banks of the river with B & Q and Comet and all those... We were shopping for stuff for the flat after the flood and I pull in the car park and Betty said, "What you doing?" And I was just stood looking at the river, well OK it's tidal of course... but I said to Betty, "Just come here a minute Betty, what do you see?" "Water". I said, "The height of the water". And she didn't know.

Betty: Well I'd never been used to water.

Chris: But that water was high, that water was high. I mean they talk about, God almighty about the sea levels rising. It didn't need to rise a lot Beccy I'll tell you, it was higher than I had ever seen it. Just stood on the car park then I thought, God Almighty that's high. I'd never seen anything like it. That's going back let's face it, it must have been '73, that would have been about 1968, 1970 time. So we are going back thirty years but that's risen since that time. It could have been the top of the tide but I was used to the top of the tide anyway you know. There's quite a large, there's a big difference between top and on spring tides, they are the worse, they get high... And yet as Betty says, the properties around the river never flooded.

Betty and Chris, residents
Interview, December 19th 2008

Betty and Chris's anxiety about the future was thus fuelled by the feeling that they had no control over the impacts of climate change.

Other diarists chose to emphasise the role of the various authorities in creating the disaster. Those who thought that mismanagement of the drainage infrastructure was to blame differed in their beliefs about whether these problems were now being corrected with some residents believing that serious actions were being taken, while others were less confident that any significant change would take place. In both cases, evidence of work being carried out – such as drains being cleaned, rivers being dredged or improvements made to pumping stations – tended to make people feel more confident about the future. For example, Andy explained during a group discussion that he was not worried about his property flooding again because he believed the flooding in his area was due to a particular infrastructural problem that had now been solved. By contrast, James felt extremely negative about the future because his attempts to get the drains cleaned in his neighbourhood were ignored. His frustrations were especially intense because he worked regularly with the council through his job and held a position of some authority, yet even this was not enough to get things done, as he described:

Beccy Do you feel anxious at all when it rains now or not?

James Yes, every time because I'm still not convinced that the council are doing what they said they are and until I see it's happened and there's remedial work needs doing. We have things here called ten foots.

Beccy Oh, the little alleys at the back of the houses?

James Yes, and some of these ten foots are private but the councils have come down and tarmaced them and when they've tarmaced them they've tarmaced over the drains, which has made the situation much worse. So now resident groups are forming and saying, "We wish you to come back, to identify where the drains are and open and clean those drains. Because yes,

- whilst they are private, you did it therefore you sort it out”. And the argument that we have at the moment is “Ah well, we are Lib Dem and it was the Labour Council that actually were in power when they did it”. So it’s going to be hard to sort it out.
- Beccy So they are saying, “Why should we do anything about it, when we didn’t?”
- James I think things like the Interim Flooding Report have rubbed people up the wrong way. You always say the devil’s in the detail, you’ll know all this with your reports and they’ve made statements like the drains were not blocked, well we know the drains were not blocked, they were severely restricted. So it’s the choice of words.
- Beccy Wording, sure. So do you think this wouldn’t have happened were they not?
- James Five years ago the council decided they would cut costs by reducing the amount of drain cleaning and they reduced it to one and they’ve saved a hundred and twenty thousand pounds a year. Now the council will only admit that. They said that the reason they took that decision was all the information that they put out about climate change, which is bunkham, wait till it happens and then come back on it. And they’ve really let the residents down and if they’d been in business they’d have votes of no confidence and they would have been kicked out. I don’t hold some of the individual councillors responsible but Cabinet has made these decisions and passed them and must have been aware of what the ramifications might have been. So there’s a lot of bitterness. I’ve had to be careful because I was getting quite excited at one time that things were not being done. Especially when the water was still coming up, I knew the drains needed cleaning and I was forthright in my communication to the Area Director and was chastised for it. You know, hundreds of people are going to be flooded on this one road and it needs that drain cleaning and it’s not that I had any extra information, it was just the way that it was. Anybody would have known on the street.
- James resident and worker
Interview, November 14th 2007

This extended extract from James’s interview also illustrates how the floods can act to undermine people’s faith in the authorities and organisations that have responsibilities for managing flood risk. Indeed, Emma, who was in her 70s, felt so let down by the local authority that she said she would not be voting in the 2008 local elections for the first time in her life. For diarists, one of the most striking and frustrating revelations to have emerged from the floods was a realisation of the fragmented nature of drainage management and the barriers that such fragmentation presented for attempts to generate meaningful change for the future:

- Anna See you can’t really get anyone pinpointed down to say who is responsible can you, no one will say.
- Nigel I don’t think they ever would.
- Anna You know, one says it’s one body and another says it’s another body and nobody ever says it was their problem.
- Elizabeth But that’s dangerous isn’t it; nobody is going to admit to being responsible are they?
- Nigel Whether it’s Yorkshire Water or Hull City Council.
- Maggie But they’ve got to decide between them who is responsible for what.
- Group discussion, July 17th 2008

In response to these perceived failings, diarists spent a lot of time in group discussions talking about how they felt drainage infrastructure management could be improved in the future.

5.3.3 Lack of control

Many diarists appeared to be anxious about the future precisely because they felt there was nothing they could do to protect themselves from future floods or change their situations. For example, Tessa described what she saw as the frightening and unstoppable way in which the water had come up through her floors:

- Tessa: How many people got a letter as we did, asking what we'd done to our property to make it flood proof? I mean we got this letter and we looked at it and we said, "Well what can we do?"
- Beccy: Who was that from Tessa, do you know?
- Tessa: No I can't remember who it was from but we got this letter and it said, "What have you done to make your house flood proof?" And yes we raised the floor in the porch didn't we by six inches. But there was nothing else that we could do.
- Bob: But it came through the airbricks. But as that lady said if your next-door neighbour hasn't got it [flood protection measures].
- Tessa: It's still going to come in.
- [talking over each other]
- Tessa: The day of the floods we came down our stairs and it was half past one in the morning, there was a black patch in front of the front door. So it showed it had come through the front door, although the front door is double-glazed it was coming through the crack. And as I walked through to the kitchen, the carpet was coming up, it wasn't coming through the front door; it was coming through the floor.

Group discussion, October 23rd 2008

Feelings of a loss of control were also apparent during the recovery process. For example, Caroline's diary showed how trapped she felt when she was unable to control things or move the repairs forward:

"Haven't heard when builders are going to start on our house. I sometimes think we spend half our lives lately waiting for other people to make decisions about our lives. It takes control out of our hands & I struggle with that. It's all about waiting."

Caroline, resident
Diary, January 21st 2008

This sense of a loss of control was also reflected in the ways in which people talked about disruptions to their future life plans. For example, Leanne and her husband were preparing to retire and had always planned on downsizing to free up some cash for this process but they were worried that their house would have lost value and that they would have to change their plans as a result. Meanwhile, Charlotte, Andy and Sally were in the opposite situation – as young people on the first steps of the housing ladder, they had been planning to move to bigger properties with space for a family but, like Leanne, they were concerned that, since the floods, they would not find acceptable prices – or even buyers – for their homes. Add to this people's concerns about the changing fabric of the community, as discussed in section 5.2, and we can see how far-reaching the implications of a flood can be.

5.3.4 Shaping the built environment

As they grew in confidence through their participation in the project, diarists also began to call for new forms of engagement where they would be able to take part in future decision making on a more even footing with other stakeholders involved in managing the built environment. For example, diarists felt that policy makers should consult with and include them as active participants in their planning for future infrastructural developments. The following extended extract illustrates diarists' views about new forms of governance and the ways in which this is related to their perceptions of the future:

- Leanne Again we need a body like an ombudsman, we need a body of people that can liaise with all these people, get the information and say, "Right you need to do that, you need to apply for funding for that, you need to do that and then we need to let the people know that this is all happening". There isn't such a body. How stupid all these however many grade of government, there isn't such a body that deals with all that.
- Amy I mean the Internal Drainage Boards have gone, they used to be around because we had one in Hessle. And they need to bring those back because like Leanne said, the situation we have, we have the Environment Agency dealing with our open drains, which is classed as a river, we then have the council dealing with gully drains and our sewers are all dealt with by Yorkshire Water, who the Environment Agency council have been very good, they have representatives come to our meeting, they discuss with us the update, although things are moving slowly, they are moving but slowly. Yorkshire Water won't actually come and actually get involved with us and that's something, Alan Johnson is trying to get them involved for us. But we have all those different agencies that altogether, each of their little bits, have affected our flooding. So you can't just go to one and say, "What's happening and deal with it". And things get passed back, "That's not our responsibility, that's not our responsibility, that bit is but that bit isn't. We can do this but it won't make any difference to all that stuff". And I think that's how it's going right across Hull and the surrounding areas that little bits might be getting done but because it's different agencies and communication.
- Maggie Do you think that body should also listen to groups like this?
- Isobel Most definitely, yes. They need to talk to people that are living it.
- Jan Exactly, we've experienced the devastation it causes.
- Maggie So they need to convince you that they are doing it?
- Isobel Yes, exactly.
- Leanne Because when people pay their taxes and their wages and we are at the end of the chain, they need to feed the information down.
- Maggie Well you can ask the right questions because you've been through it.
- Amy Yes, they need to convince us with facts and figures and proof that things won't work because just saying, "Oh no that isn't going to work", when we've been sat thinking about this for the last eight or nine months because of what's happened. We've worked things out in our heads, we see solutions, they might not be the right solutions but we can see you know, solutions to it working. We need to be told if it won't work and why it won't work.
- Maggie Would it make you feel more secure if that happened?
- Amy Yes, as long as it's not false promises.

Group discussion, April 24th 2008

Participants also used their diaries to critique what they saw as short-sighted policies in relation to planning permission and flood risk management. Elizabeth wrote in her diary:

“On the bus going to Church the route goes via Kings Wood in a small vicinity in that area are building developers erecting new housing projects – they include BEAL’S, BARRATT’S, DAVID WILSON HOMES, PERSIMMONS - WHIMPY ETC – all in the flood areas affected by June 25th 2007 – some even with caravans outside existing houses & building still going on land with standing water. When Kingswood was being built a few years ago many of us on Bransholme signed petitions against it being built because then it was obvious – present sewers etc would not cope – & now all these years later & in view of recent flooding in the same sort of areas – many more properties are still being built. How are these companies still getting permission to do this – where will it lead – & will any of us still get insurance – there are many questions to be answered I feel.”

Elizabeth, resident
Diary, February 17th, 2008

Isobel’s diary also records concerns about the government’s plans to manage future flood risk. She felt that strategies were being focused upon the threat of fluvial and coastal flooding at the expense of the pluvial event that destroyed her home:

“On the news this morning the government are promising to fund insurance companies in the event of any more floods to make sure people are not losing their cover for flood. In some cases they have been saying they will cover but there is anything from £10,000 to £50,000 excess to pay. The idea from government is to stop them from doing that. Unfortunately with this government they don’t say where the one will come from and I suspect it will cost us in the end. They have also made funds available to build up flood defences but I think someone has forgotten the water in this area wasn’t from rivers it was sewage from the drains coming back up.”

Isobel, resident
Diary, 10th July 2008

5.3.5 Developing flood strategies

Diarists’ thoughts about the future were not restricted to things that they thought policy makers should do. A number of participants also reflected on actions that they could take to help themselves. For example, Charlotte, a young woman in her 20s, felt that the floods had revealed how unprepared she was for any kind of future emergency:

“I’m lucky that I’ve got my Mum and Dad because, if I’d been on my own, I would have had no clue how to go about doing... You know. I think it’s knowing how things should be done. I don’t know. I’m just not very good at stuff like that... Which has made me think I should learn how to check oil in my car myself now, you know. And learn how to change lightbulbs and fuses myself... I mean, I can’t do anything! I can’t cook. I can’t do anything for myself. But, once I move back in, I’m going to learn to check my car, change my fuses – I mean, having said that, we’re going to put new electrics in so I won’t have to, but, you know, stuff like that I’m going to learn how to do because you realise that... I mean, I didn’t even have a torch or anything. I had nothing in my house that... I mean, we talk about the council not being prepared, but I certainly wasn’t prepared.”

Charlotte, resident and worker
Interview, November 14th 2007

As described previously, Bruce was also worried about the threat of future flooding and, as a result, he had paid to have soakaways installed in his garden and had invested in a stock of engineering bricks (that don't soak up water) which could be used to raise his sofa and other furniture in the event of a future flood. He had also devised his own version of a flood plan for his household whereby he knew what he and his wife would do in the event of the water level rising. One example of this was that he kept his daughters' toys in boxes downstairs so that they could be moved upstairs easily and quickly if need be.

Other diarists spoke about being more vigilant so as to be able to check for any potential problems. In Leanne's case this involved not just a visual (and aural) surveillance of the local drainage network, but also a coordinated action plan with her next door neighbours so that they could help protect each others' properties in the event of a repeat incident. Leanne felt that she shouldn't have to do this – she believed such actions were only necessary because the organizations involved could not be trusted to do their jobs properly:

“I walk my dogs past the open one [drain] every day on purpose, so that I can listen and see the water flowing and know what's going on. And if it isn't I want to know why and then I'm ringing Yorkshire Water to ask why, but I shouldn't have to do that. We've got a contingency plan, a few of us, next doors, two houses opposite and one round the corner and we've got keys and we've got all the mobile phone numbers to ring them when they are at work. And I'm usually the one that's on watch, so if it's raining heavily they are ringing me and I'll say, “No there's not a problem yet but I'm watching it carefully”.

Leanne, resident
Group discussion, April 24th 2008

Leanne's action plan was also captured in her diary on a day when it rained heavily and she came close to taking action:

“Tuesday rain – on a severe weather warning – heavy rain brings back painful memories. Have a save the furniture plan for us & next door as her husband is in Germany on business. Because we have a large excess on home insurance (£10,000) we will have to minimise loss of belongings this time if the need arises – can't go out today – have to be at home on flood watch.”

Leanne, resident
Diary, June 2nd 2008

Such diary entries show a new awareness of flood risk and a willingness to take action – sometimes on a coordinated basis with neighbours – designed to protect the home and property from damage.

5.3.6 Resilient homes?

For some diarists without insurance, part of the recovery journey was learning the lessons and trying to get insurance for the future. For example, Helen, a council tenant, had no contents insurance and had to

re-furnish her home on a very limited income (she was disabled and couldn't work). Having had this experience, Helen was determined to purchase insurance to protect her home in future. However, none of the companies she contacted would insure her. Karen, whose home flooded twice in June 2007 and January 2008, had a similar experience. Even those whose cover was intact sometimes found the terms of their new policies very unfavourable, as Leanne described:

“We went on the web looking for insurances and, like you say Isobel, other insurance companies don't particularly want to take you on and the premiums were that high it was unbelievable. So we stuck with the same insurance company and they took us back on and the premium only went up £50 and that wasn't a problem. But the excess has gone up £5,000 we have to pay on contents and £5,000 on buildings. So if the same thing happened again we've £10,000 to find before we start. And where do we pluck that from? Where do we get that from? We haven't got £10,000. Or do we save anything at all or do we literally just let the whole lot go and say it's all gone and claim what we can and just have everything lesser?”

Leanne, resident
Group discussion, July 17th 2008

Leanne's story shows how problems such as lost savings and major policy excesses can place diarists in a weaker position with respect to the future with the result that, if the floods did happen again, many would struggle financially, to say nothing of the devastating emotional impact that would result from having to face the disaster for a second time. Indeed, Amy estimated that, despite being fully insured, she and her husband had spent £10,000 of their own savings as a result of the floods.

The floods also highlighted the problematic relationship between insurance and resilient repair. Government policy is currently trying to encourage residents in flood risk areas to have property level flood resistance and resilience measures fitted in their homes as these can reduce the economic costs of flooding and ensure that residents are able to return to their homes more quickly, thereby minimising the amount of disruption they have to experience (Defra 2008a).

Some participants did have such measures fitted in their homes. Tim's professional experience as a structural engineer meant that he was able to make the decision to pay for some more radical measures during repairs to his home. In this case, his actions were prompted by a higher level of knowledge about what options were available, thus avoiding the feelings of helplessness experienced by those described above. He also had sufficient income to pay for these additional measures which were not covered by insurance.

Tim: As regards the floors we are going to put them back in concrete rather than the timber floor again. It will be a timber finish but it will be concrete up to sort of about that depth from the floor level. The hall is an oak floor so we are having that put back in oak.

Interviewer: With the concrete, is that because you know if something was to happen again it would be...?

Tim: Yes that's right, the airbricks will be replaced with solid bricks so the water won't be able to get in. The worst scenario would be that if it came up to the same level again it could still get to the wooden floor but that would be just floorboards and battens to be replaced, not right down to the bottom. But let's hope it never happens again.

Tim, resident
Interview, December 6th 2007

However, most residents did not have such measures installed during repairs to their homes because they felt they would take too long and because their insurers would not pay for them, as Leanne described:

"Some people round here have had solid concrete floors put in so it can't come up through the floor again. But a) it's an extra cost, which some loss adjusters wouldn't sanction and others it's impractical because of where the house is and the level of the house and in other places it takes so long to dry that it puts you so far back that people have said, 'oh I can't wait that long, I just can't go with that'. So most of us haven't had it done, I think two people have had it done in this area."

Leanne, resident
Interview, November 29th 2007

Issues of expertise were also important here, as Laura described how her surveyor recommended flood resistance measures during the repairs of her home, only to have these recommendations ignored by the builder.

"They didn't even fill our recess, where the water actually sat, because the chartered surveyor came round, the loss adjuster's trouble shooter, who was brought in at the end. And he said, 'Oh I think we could fill your void up with concrete and then put your membrane in'. And then the builder came in and said, 'Oh no we are not doing that, this was put there for a purpose'. I said, 'All right then', I said, 'but the chartered surveyor mentioned it', I said. 'Oh no we are not'. So it was never done."

Laura, resident
Group discussion, October 23rd 2008

Diarists also mentioned that, although they would be interested in flood resistance and resilience measures in principle, they needed more trustworthy information about what measures would be effective. For example, some participants said that they had had leaflets about flood gates pushed through their door but they remained unconvinced about the efficacy of such measures and worried that this was another case of companies trying to profit from the disaster. Finally, a few people noted that they would be more inclined to install these measures if their reduced risk was reflected through a discount in their insurance premiums.

Sally: If it [property resistance and resilience measures] made a difference to your insurance, I think you'd be more keen – if it was taken into account.

Bruce: Well that's the other point. And I did say to the chap from the Association of British Insurers... 'If people signed up to the Floodline number, could that give them a discount from the insurance companies?' Because if you get a phone call saying that there's a potential flood, you'd hike everything

upstairs. You'd limit the number of valuables below. Where's the incentive to join the Floodline? You know, it's benefitting insurance companies because, if it did happen again, a lot of stuff would be upstairs... But the response from him, I think, was something to do with data protection and stuff of that nature. And it negates the object of trying to formulate some linkage between everybody involved, which is kind of the crux of the problem, isn't it?

Group discussion, Oct 23rd 2008

As this extract shows, some diarists were willing to think seriously about the possibility of having flood resistance and resilience measures installed. However, they were also concerned that such actions would not be reflected in the terms of their insurance policies.

5.3.7 Capability building

Finally, as described in the last chapter, the project also had a significant impact on some diarists' feelings about themselves and their communities. In the first instance, many people's involvement with the project was motivated by a desire to make things better for those affected by flooding in future and, as the project progressed, diarists felt that they might be ideally placed to do this because of what had happened to them:

"In the future, if it ever happened again, for whatever area, people that have experienced it can probably help an awful lot more than people who have been told what to do... It just needs to be someone with the right skills because they've been through it."

Amy, resident

Group discussion, July 17th 2008

The diarists growing confidence in the expertise they had around flood recovery issues was also reflected in their increasing interaction with our project steering group and their willingness to talk to other 'experts' – and also others in the community more generally – about their recovery experiences (see section 5.3.4 and 2.3.7 for more on this).

"I feel more confident now and I can help more people in our community since being on the project. I have also joined some local council groups which help local people in our community with different problems."

Diarist, Follow-up survey 2009.

"The project has made me a lot more confident in speaking out and getting a point forward. In the past I have been in the background but not had any input but now I feel able to join in more and ask questions."

Diarist, Follow-up survey 2009.

However, it is important to be clear that these were not the only perspectives expressed by the diarists in their responses to the survey. For example, some people felt that they were already confident and played an active part in their community before the diary study, while others said that they did not feel the project had helped them engage. Nevertheless, it was clear that some of those taking part in the study did

find a clearer sense of their role and an increased confidence in their own opinions. We feel that there is therefore an important sense in which the project was not just a research process but a powerful tool for promoting stakeholder engagement and public participation in policy making.

5.3.8 Summary

If an account of recovery stopped at the moment of the return home, the story would be incomplete. Not only have we learnt from diarists that the process of recovery extends beyond the moment of return, we have also learnt in this section that diarists carry with them a different sense of the future than before the flood event. They are, as we might expect, anxious when it rains. And with that, some are also anxious about the causes of heavy rain, particularly climate change. Yet if there is a loss of control it is not necessarily because they think nothing can be done. Some diaries do reveal a sense of fatalism. (And some of this is directed at the authorities themselves). However, others are concerned to engage in debates about how the built environment is managed in relation to the future risk of flood. For example there are calls for more public participation in decision-making around drainage and the built environment and demands for a stronger role for local knowledge in drainage management issues. Diarists have also been keen to develop their own strategies of flood management and resilience. However, this process has been hampered by a range of factors including the limitations of insurance rules and incentives, a lack of knowledge from builders and an uncertainty over what measures could be applied successfully to the context of a particular property.

5.4 Chapter summary

This chapter has focused on the question of what is involved at the end of the flood recovery journey. Of course we have suggested that there is not, in fact, a clear end. However, what we have found is a process of rebuilding social life through a process of adjusting to a new sense of home, to a changed sense of community relations and to a changed sense of the future.

Moving back home is not as *straightforward* as we might expect – diarists experience a changed internal environment that feels alien to them and they must learn to give new meanings to it. Such problems are exacerbated by poor quality workmanship and builders who treat the repairs as ‘an insurance job’. Diarists also find that the experience of moving back is not necessarily the same for their neighbours. Communities have changed, sometimes for better, sometimes for worse. It therefore makes no sense to talk about the home or community ‘returning to normality’ because although certain ‘normal’ feelings and activities may be resumed, individuals, homes and communities have also changed in multiple and sometimes conflicting directions, where the new allegiances formed must be set against the new divisions that can open up, for example between the insured and uninsured, the flooded and the non-flooded.

What we find, then, is that recovery is about readjustment and adaptation to a new and altered set of circumstances, rather than a return as such. And with that readjustment comes a changed sense of the future. For some this is about a loss of control, a sense of fatalism. This fatalism is sometimes attributed

to the weather, to climate change, and sometimes to a perception of a lack of action by the relevant authorities. Yet others have developed strategies for the future. They have their own flood plans in place. They would like to make their homes more resilient, either physically or with renewed insurance, and are frustrated at the barriers that prevent them from doing so. And they want to engage in debates about change in the management of the built environment. Clearly their journeys have not finished. But neither has our learning. It is this learning that we think needs to take place to which we now turn.