

**TRANSPORT AND WORKS ACT 1992
TRANSPORT AND WORKS (INQUIRIES PROCEDURE) RULES 2004
TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990
BOSTON BARRIER ORDER**

**DOCUMENT EA/11/1
PROOF OF EVIDENCE
OF
MICHAEL GILBERT**

MARCH 2017

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 My name is Michael Gilbert.
- 1.2 I live in the centre of Boston, one of the areas affected by the December 2013 tidal surge. My home was flooded up to a depth of about 18 inches.
- 1.3 At the time of the flood I was a resident of and the Boston Borough Councillor for Central Ward (a role I held from 2007 until 2015) and the County Councillor for the Boston East area. Central Ward was the most devastated of all the Borough wards in Boston. I knew many people in the affected area and saw first-hand the utter devastation brought to town centre homes on the evening of the 13th December 2013.

2. SCOPE OF EVIDENCE

- 2.1 I am appearing at the inquiry in support of the proposed Boston Barrier Scheme ('the Scheme').
- 2.2 My proof of evidence describes the impacts of flooding on the town of Boston, and the need for the Scheme. In particular it describes my personal experience of the December 2013 tidal surge.
- 2.3 The information contained in my proof of evidence addresses Matter 1 in the Secretary of State's Statement of Matters: - **the aims of, and the need for, the proposed Boston Barrier and related works ("the scheme")**.

3. IMPACTS OF FLOODING ON BOSTON

- 3.1 On 13 Dec 2013 the combined tidal surge, strong winds and low pressure created the conditions for the sea over topping the flood defences in the town centre. The Grand Sluice lock gates had been left closed to prevent flooding further up river.
- 3.2 The resulting tidal surge flooded homes in a large area of the town centre. Depending on location some flooded to a level of four feet with others getting wet carpets with lower levels of inundation. In total some 600 homes were affected.
- 3.3 From my vantage point in Tower Street the vast majority of homes affected were those which spanned the river Haven and the area looked like a war zone. Furniture and household items, white goods and clothing was piled up along streets, some too small to easily be accessed by lorry.
- 3.4 Many of the areas affected by the December 2013 flooding; such as Oxford Street and Pulvertoft Lane, had become areas predominantly occupied by newly arrived communities. Many residents in these communities did not have household insurance. Following the flood I was aware of at least two Ward residents one who lived in a Housing Association property who also did not have insurance and had to rely on family to assist them after the flood.
- 3.5 The personal impact on many people put strains on mental and physical health. Items of a sentimental nature were lost forever and some elderly people did not return to the homes they had occupied for decades.

- 3.6 The effects of the flood itself lasted several weeks whilst the Council cleared the streets of damaged household items. The community pulled together and supported one another which was a positive outcome from what was a very negative, shocking and tragic experience.
- 3.7 Almost immediately after the flood was over we had another possible tidal surge which led to seepage through the ground but failed to deliver the devastation of the 13th December. Since then there have been at least two possible incidents, one as recently as January 2017.
- 3.8 The tide rises to unprecedented levels now even in summer and leaves those of us who walk from our town centre homes into Boston wondering what the impact would be if this was combined with the other climatic factors such as strong winds even in summertime.

4. MY EXPERIENCE OF THE DECEMBER 2013 FLOOD

- 4.1 Following the flood I was able to get insurance but with a higher premium and excess. However many people were not so lucky and it became clear that to some insurers Boston was too high a risk. Following the flood the insurance company sent an assessor around very quickly.
- 4.2 Much of my furniture, being solid wood, was saved. However, those who didn't have the benefit of "family hand-me-downs" would have had to dispose of much of their household contents as anything of "modern construction" – made of glue, staples and MDF - would simply have fallen apart. A significant number of homes would have had furniture of this type and disposing of the damaged furniture which was left in the street added to the picture of devastation.
- 4.3 Once the flood had receded, within about six hours then the work started to rectify the damage to my house. This was long term and onerous. The wet carpets were removed and the contractors brought into my home what I called "suckers and blowers" large fans which whirred all day and all night as well as de humidifiers which hummed. I was able to cope with this but a family with young children or ill family members would not have coped. It was like living inside a building site. There was dust and filth around for months.
- 4.4 The plaster was taken off the walls back to the brick to enable the area where the inundation had occurred to dry. I can't remember exactly how long it took to get the all clear for re-instatement work but it seemed like months and months. The bricks looked dry but the moisture content was too high to allow work to take place (any new plaster work would simply "blow").
- 4.5 Once the all clear was given the work could start to reinstate the affected rooms. In my case this was a downstairs toilet, kitchen, breakfast room, dining room and living room. Again the work took longer than anticipated and was not completed until the end of 2014. The total cost of the refurbishment and works was about £27,000. It was a horrendous year.

5. BENEFITS OF THE SCHEME

- 5.1 Boston town centre and the lives of the people who live in what are often cheaper town centre properties were devastated by the events of 2013. The town needs to develop economically and this is in my opinion hampered by the risk of flooding. The costs associated with house building in the area reduce the profitability of the town centre as an area for business and residential growth. A barrier would make Boston look more attractive for inward investment and would protect the historic infrastructure which has a world class providence such as the "Stump"

and the Guildhall. Boston contributes to the nation's foodbasket but is limited in the potential for diversification by the ever present risk of flooding.

- 5.2 The scheme would significantly reduce the risk of town centre flooding and it will be a great relief to all town centre residents and those with town centre businesses as well as the Boston Stump.

6. CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The lives of people of much of Boston are overshadowed by the risk of flooding. The risk of flooding seems to be a growing risk and the devastation it causes creates misery and economic hardship. Boston as a town is hampered in its attempts to develop its economy due to the flood risk issue. Eliminating flood risk will allow people to feel more confident about the town. It will help attract inward investment and it will help to preserve Boston's world class heritage.

7. STATEMENT OF TRUTH

I hereby declare that the contents of this proof of evidence are true.