

INCREASING FLOOD PLAIN COULD SPELL DISASTER FOR NEW HOMES WARNS THB

The Traditional Housing Bureau (THB) is expressing concern in light of the increasing number of homes that are now deemed to be at risk from flooding. The latest Flood Map created by the Environment Agency shows a total of 2.2 million homes are now at risk of flooding in the UK, an increase of c. 400,000.

The Government's Sustainable Communities Plan sets out a strategy for the development of 200,000 new homes in the South East by 2016. Many of these will be built in locations at risk from flooding from the sea, rivers or because of the existing drainage systems cannot cope with the high density of new developments. And with planners increasingly looking for land with which to meet these targets more and more areas are being reclassified and the flood plain is increasing – 35% more rivers are now included on the Flood Map as representing a risk to homes in the vicinity.

“Of course all new planning proposals in such areas must include suitable flood defences but at present this does not include provisions for the type of materials used within the construction of the actual dwelling built, despite concerns raised by the Association of British Insurers that this may have a significant effect on the cost of repairs and refurbishment”, explains Barry Holmes, executive director of the Traditional Housing Bureau.

The Association of British Insurers (ABI) in its guidance document 'Strategic Planning for Flood Risk in the Growth Areas – Insurance Considerations' points out that unless sufficient precautions are taken to minimise the damage that may be caused, many properties may be uninsurable or the cost prohibitive, affecting the marketability of a new development. The ABI highlights specific measures relating to the construction of homes that may assist in reducing the damage caused by flooding including the use of “concrete floors instead of wood”.

This is because in the event of flooding concrete materials – floors and walls - will remain sound, will not be subject to the concerns over rotting that can affect other materials and will not warp if dried out quickly either.

Barry Holmes of THB supports this advice and asks the Government to take this one step further in the recently announced review of PPG25: “Having opened the floodgate the Government must take responsibility for ensuring that what is built will be sustainable and durable enough to withstand the increasing likelihood of such risks.”

The THB, which contributed to the Sustainable Buildings Task Group report recently welcomed by John Prescott, has lobbied for the inclusion of concrete masonry floors and walls in all housing built near to or within floodplains.

Barry Holmes again: “We are building more and more within areas susceptible to flooding and we must therefore ensure that newly built homes will prove to be a solid investment whether for private individuals or for housing groups funded by the public purse – all should be protected from such risk and built with the appropriate materials.

It is not enough that this relates to the provision of suitable defences and drainage, it should also include the building methods and materials that homes are constructed from. After all once a home is flooded, it is the performance of the building and how it withstands the water ingress that will determine the success and longevity of such developments and their financial viability. With predictions for extreme climatic variation providing an added danger, the planning process should require the use of appropriate materials necessary to withstand such threats.”

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