

Being there before the water rises



How Lucy Eccles helps Gloucestershire communities build flood resilience

When you speak with Lucy Eccles, Community Resilience Officer at Gloucestershire Rural Community Council, one thing becomes clear very quickly: she believes deeply in the power of communities to prepare, adapt and support each other long before an emergency hits.

With a background in geography and a long standing interest in rural communities, Lucy describes her role as “a natural fit”, a place where her academic grounding, love of the outdoors, and commitment to community action come together.

“I’ve always been interested in how people come together in times of need,” she says.

“I studied resilience and natural disasters at university, but I wanted to actually do something with that knowledge, not just read about solutions, but help implement them.”

Nine months into the role, Lucy is at the heart of Gloucestershire’s approach to community-led flood preparedness.

Coordinating a county-wide Flood Warden Network

Much of Lucy’s time is devoted to managing GRCC’s Volunteer Flood Warden Scheme, a partnership funded by four district and borough councils: Tewkesbury, Cotswold, Stroud and Cheltenham.

The scheme now supports more than 100 volunteer flood wardens, each embedded in their local community, keeping an eye on water levels, supporting neighbours, raising awareness, and sharing information with authorities.

“Gloucestershire’s geography means flooding is always a concern,” Lucy explains.

“Whether communities are dealing with river flooding, surface water, or groundwater issues, the flood warden role looks different everywhere. But what unites them is a commitment to supporting people where they live.”

GRCC provides induction, basic training and quarterly meetings, giving wardens the tools to prepare their communities, monitoring conditions, sharing local intelligence, and engaging residents before flooding becomes a crisis.



And that proactive approach is needed more each year.

With near constant rainfall in early 2026 and saturated ground across the county, Lucy describes Gloucestershire as “a very wet county” and highlights how vital local monitoring and preparedness have become.

Helping communities plan for emergencies. Not just floods.

Beyond floods, Lucy works closely with parish and town councils to develop Community Emergency Plans, grassroots documents that help residents identify local assets, volunteers, and practical steps they can take in any emergency.

“Community emergency planning is about building confidence and recognising what’s already there,” she says.

“People pull together in an emergency, whether that’s shopping for elderly neighbours during COVID, clearing a blocked ditch or supporting a warm hub during a power cut.”

Lucy helps communities draft, review, and even exercise their plans, ensuring they’re not just documents on a shelf but living, usable resources.

For some areas the challenge is finding volunteers; for others it’s strengthening engagement.

GRCC’s role is to meet each place where it is.

A strong relationship with the Local Resilience Forum

A big part of GRCC’s resilience work happens through its long standing involvement with the Gloucestershire Local Resilience Forum, the partnership that brings together emergency services, councils, voluntary organisations and other statutory responders.

GRCC sits on two LRF subgroups.

The Community Resilience Subgroup, working alongside emergency planners, councils and the Red Cross and the Voluntary Sector Subgroup, bringing together all voluntary organisations involved in emergency preparedness or response.

These groups meet quarterly, giving Lucy and her colleagues essential updates, training and partnerships, while ensuring the community voice is heard at a strategic level.

“The LRF is invaluable,” Lucy says.

“It helps us share learning, receive up to date information, and understand

what's happening across the county.

"But it also gives us the chance to advocate for communities and emphasise that preparedness matters just as much as response."

She acknowledges that LRFs inevitably prioritise short term response, given their statutory duties, yet stresses the need to champion long term, preventative work.

"Every pound invested in societal resilience generates significant public value," she notes, referencing recent research from the National Consortium for Societal Resilience.

Challenges on the ground: funding and long-term support

While Lucy's enthusiasm is clear, she doesn't gloss over the frustrations, especially the uncertainty surrounding local authority funding.

"Our work is long term. Building resilience takes time, relationships and trust. But we're often funded on short cycles," she explains.

"It's really difficult to tell community volunteers that we may not be able to support them next year because our funding runs out."

That's why GRCC continues to advocate for longer-term funding commitments and recognition that volunteer-led resilience only thrives when there is proper support behind it.

Beyond floods: Linking resilience with climate action

Another part of Lucy's role is helping parish and town councils explore wider sustainability and climate issues.

GRCC recently launched a Community Climate Action Toolkit, enabling councils to start conversations about everything from cost-of-living challenges to environmental co-benefits.

"It's not about pushing climate messaging for its own sake," Lucy says.

"It's about helping communities identify what matters to them and often the things that improve resilience also help the environment."

From community book swaps to energy-saving measures in village halls, small actions often lead to bigger conversations.

Advice for other ACRE members: Be clear, be confident, be present

Lucy offers thoughtful advice for other ACRE Members looking to strengthen



ties with their LRF.

She emphasises the importance of being clear about your role, noting that they are not responders and do not provide round the clock emergency response, but instead focus on preparedness, engagement, and long term community resilience, which she highlights as highly valuable.

Her advice is to show up by attending meetings, especially in person, as informal conversations can be particularly impactful.

Networking widely is also key, as even events that may not seem directly relevant can lead to valuable connections.

Lucy advises bringing ideas forward with confidence, stressing that community knowledge is often underestimated, yet provides insights that statutory agencies cannot.

Finally, she stresses the importance of not underselling services, saying that their expertise should be recognised and properly resourced.

A voice for communities

Lucy's reflections demonstrate the vital role local infrastructure organisations play in making communities safer, more connected and more resilient.

Her work coordinating volunteers, supporting councils, collaborating with the LRF, championing community voices shows what resilience really looks like: patient, practical, local and rooted in relationships.

"Ultimately," Lucy says, "it's about empowering communities before the water rises, before the power cuts, before the crisis hits.

"That's where resilience starts."



Action with Communities in Rural England

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