

THE BIG Citizen ISSUE

COUNTY businesses are more aware and positive about doing something about climate change – after all many have had the experience of being in the front line with the floods of 2007.

Gloucestershire could lead the way in adapting and showing the rest of country how it could be done.

We have just experienced the hottest April since records began 352 years ago.

The UK Met Office reported that the average temperature for April across central England was more than 4C above average.

It has also been the warmest Easter since 1949. Gloucestershire has had its fair share of the warm weather.

But is it climate change? And if so, what can we expect in the future?

Climate change is a reality, and although there will always be those who doubt this, the scientific evidence has to command our full attention.

Although in reality the time to stop it has almost passed, we have to try.

Current climate projections from the UK Climate Impacts Programme (UKCIP) indicate that Gloucestershire is likely to experience more hot days (more than 25C) in summer, less cloud in summer (leading to the risk of sunburn), more extreme events (unpredictable and severe weather ie heat waves, gales and storms), frequent intense winter rainfall (flooding) but less summer rainfall (drought).

The consequences are wide ranging, and include disruption to transport, buildings becoming unsafe, damage to infrastructure, flooding, water contamination and water shortages.

These are events we have witnessed already.

Hidden costs include increased pressure on the health service through increased admissions, power failures because sub-stations overheat or become flooded and logistical issues such as a lack of the right equipment in the right place at the right time.

Gloucestershire's weather seems to be changing and will continue to change.

The July 2007 flood was an extreme event with 1.5 times the average July total rainfall coming in one day.

Such events are very likely to become more common.

The cost to Gloucestershire businesses of the July 2007 flood alone was £14.3 million.

Business is one of the most vulnerable sectors in our county.



THINGS TO COME: Commuter traffic grinds to a standstill on the A40 Golden Valley in the 2007 floods.

Get firm hold on extreme weather

Dr Gregory Masters, an expert on climate change from Stroud, and an internationally-recognised ecologist



7,500 businesses hit

THE county was in crisis in 2007 when Gloucestershire's waterways was unable to cope with immense rainfall.

More than 5,000 homes in Gloucestershire were flooded in July 2007, with nearly 2,000 people forced to leave their houses and find temporary accommodation.

The crisis reached its peak when the Mythe water treatment works, near Tewkesbury, flooded.

Its shutdown led to more

than 135,000 homes and 7,500 businesses receiving no mains water for up to 12 days, with a further five days passing until the water arriving in taps was deemed drinkable.

The damage cost the county some £50 million.

The housing market in flooded areas plummeted amid concerns that it could happen again.

And many of the worst-struck residents saw their belongings lost or damaged beyond repair.

Research from Dent Associates, a business and science consultancy, shows that business fixed assets, supply and distribution chains, operational concerns such as how employees get to work, energy use and efficiency and, of course, insurance concerns, will all be affected by climate change.

Businesses need to fully understand the risks and to develop climate safe business plans.

Is the business ready to cope with current and future extreme storms, frequent flooding, and heat waves for example?

We already know that storms, floods and heat waves affect businesses in Gloucestershire, from manufacturing and service provision through to agriculture.

What is that disruption

going to be like in the future and what can you change to reduce the impact on your business?

We actually know more about how our climate is chan-

ging than we know about interest rate movements, currency fluctuations, economic growth, changes in markets and geo-politics and yet climate change is rarely

considered as being important.

Business cannot be made completely climate proof but, as with any other risk factor, industry must start taking them into account.

By making the investment now to adapt to a changing climate, businesses can avoid greater costs in the future.

A 2008 CBI survey indicated that only 35 per cent of UK businesses were taking action to manage the business impacts associated with a changing climate. There is a cadre of organisations promoting and supporting businesses not least Dent Associates with their own office and staff in the county.

Well, it could all be different. It can be done and it is worth doing. What is your business doing? Will it be business as usual this summer? +