

Fairford and Lechlade Flood Meeting

Keble Room, Community Centre, Fairford

18th October 2013

Attendees:

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown – MP (GC-B)
Cllr David Fowles, Portfolio Holder for the Environment, Cotswold District Council (DF)
Cllr Ray Theodoulou, Gloucestershire County Council (RT)
Cllr Mark Wardle – Fairford Ward, Cotswold District Council (MW)
Cllr Sandra Carter – Kempsford/Lechlade Ward, Cotswold District Council
Cllr Sue Coakley – Kempsford/Lechlade Ward, Cotswold District Council
Cllr Trevor Hing - Fairford Town Council
Laurence King, Flood Defence Engineer, Cotswold District Council (LK)
Philippa Lowe – Head of Planning, Cotswold District Council (PL)
David Graham – Flood risk Management Team, Gloucestershire County Council (DG)
Barry Russell – Operations Manager Environment Agency
Peter Collins –Environment Agency (PC)
Mark Mathews – Town Planning Manager, Thames Water (MM)
Anthony Crawford – Head of Wastewater Network, Thames Water (AC)
Scott Macaulay-Lowe – Local Highways Manager, Gloucestershire Highways (SM-L)
Paul Smith - Gloucestershire Highways (PS)
Claire Lock – Head of Environmental Services, Cotswold District Council

Agenda:

1. Welcome
2. Apologies
3. To agree Minutes of the meeting 15th March 2013
4. Report from Town Council/Parish Council
5. Report from District Council
6. Report from County Council
7. Report from Thames Water
8. Report from Environment Agency
9. Questions from Members of the Public
10. Lechlade Issues

1. Welcome

GC-B – apologies for being late. Welcome everybody. Lots to get through this morning. I will ask the various agencies to introduce themselves and update on progress.

PC – Environment Agency

Reeds and blockages have been removed. After many years of talking about it, the Flood Alleviation scheme is now underway. Have been working closely with the town council - hoping you will see improvements - local flood walls have been built, raised footpaths. 46 houses protected from significant flooding. Thanks to residents and professional partners. Once the scheme is complete it will affect your insurance. Flood map will be completed in a few months. Footpath bridge provided quite a bit of benefit in 2012.

MM – Thames Water

General update – the big issue is how we reacted during the past flooding events. We have improved our customer centre processes and we now have more tankers on standby with new contracts in place – this will provide better response times should flooding occur again. Working with the Environment Agency, District Council and County Council to ensure we get robust planning policies in place.

DG – Gloucestershire County Council

GCC now have lead responsibility for flooding. Have just come to the end of a consultation period. We have now stretched the consultation period and will be handing out forms at the end of the meeting and would welcome your comments. We have been part of steering group for Fairford and been working closely with all the agencies.

GC-B – Can I introduce Claire Lock on behalf of the Cotswold District Council.

CL – Cotswold District Council

CDC have three-fold responsibilities – 1) Working with the Environment Agency to deliver the schemes you see on site, 2) Responding to emergencies and dealing with communities. Fairford Community Resilience is very strong. We are here to help. 3) Planning authority – if you have any queries, my colleague, Philippa Lowe, is here to answer any questions.

GC-B – can I stress that this is a joint meeting with Fairford and Lechlade. There are a lot of issues and the only way we can do it in the day is by combining the two areas together.

PL – Cotswold District Council

There are two key elements to the application process. With regard to recent applications – we have had consultation with Thames Water and the Environment Agency – they have said that they are satisfied with the drainage and surface water; however I know there are real concerns. We are also looking much longer term with the work of the local plan and there has been a consultation on the development over the next 20 years. Working on the Infrastructure delivery plan – what provision do we need to cover the development? Also the Strategic flood risk assessment - that will need extra modelling.

CL – Lechlade - the council has been doing a lot of work. I will ask Laurence to come in on this next.

LK – Cotswold District Council

Phase one of the Lechlade work has now been completed. The Phase 2 plan is currently with the town council for comment. Very close to ironing out final comments and that plan will go through to tender. Work should start work before Christmas this year.

TH – Fairford Town Council

The bunding has now been done in the water meadow. The bit by the bridge was done by the Ernest Cook Trust and that will be replaced with planting. One of the footpaths will be open in the next 2 weeks. The other will be opened in the spring. The clapping gate will be moved. Weeds will be sprayed. Thackeray (?) Cottage – we have raised the issue that the materials didn't look very good and have found a supplier for the stone. In the spring Amcote will remove the rest of the fencing. Good progress has been made – thank you.

SC – Cotswold District Council

Laurence is right – Phase 1 has made a huge difference already. Phase 2 has been in for a technical review –and if Laurence is happy it would be good to promulgate that more around town. We have huge support from the Environment Agency. Volunteers have cleared it out. We have had an initial look at the modelling of the Upper Thames – a study has been done by the Environment Agency for the St John's priory site. May I talk about the wall gate later?

LK – we need to iron out the technical comments and then we'll have a separate meeting.

GC-B – I want to have as much time for questions. Can I now introduce Scott Macaulay-Lowe from Gloucestershire Highways.

SML – Gloucestershire Highways

Responsible for highway drainage systems. Had a meeting with the Town Council to gain a better understanding of the problems. All the work has been completed for this year. We have promised to do a CCTV survey of Milton Street. We have had the funding agreed to do that – once we have final agreement that will go ahead.

GC-B – the meeting is now open for questions

Tim Small - Lechlade trout farm. We control the sluices on the River Leach. Have brought this up at meetings before – the main river is not cleaned out by the Environment Agency. In the last 18 months we have had Japanese Knotweed in the river and it is moving 1 mile every six weeks. The plant is very big and strong and is moving very fast.

BR - Operations Manager, Environment Agency – you are right, Japanese Knotweed is very difficult to eradicate. We do have contractors who are dealing with that. I will get the details from Mr Small and ask one of the Operational gangs to see what can be done. Will need to be dealt with, given the potential that it has to cause a blockage.

GC-B – the sooner you get to it the cheaper the work will be. Can this be made an urgent priority?

Malcolm Cutler – Fairford. You say the river is going to be cleared over the next month – we have had a tree down there for a year, and also dead trees.

TH – we have also been promised that the weed would be cleared in the Autumn.

Cllr Mel Farrant – Lechlade Town Council. It is a question of drainage. Faringdon Road – the drains need to be cleared – haven't been done for over a year.

Morris Marks - Lechlade and Downton - I have seen the plans you are proposing - they do raise a number of technical questions on water flow. Can we have a meeting where you will give us detail on what is to be done and an opportunity to ask questions? People would like to know what is going to happen before we start diverting water.

Stuart Thompson – Fairford - What is involved when your contractors go down to clear the drainage. I live in Milsom Street. Two lorries arrived in Milsom Street around 11th September – one with a tanker. Gave a 3 second splash of water, took the pipe put it in the drain, then had a cigarette. For the next 2 drains – did exactly the same. I don't believe that a single piece of dirt had been taken out of those drains - nothing came out.

SM-L – I have not been down to Milsom Street. If they are only spending that little time then I can only assume that the water was running clear. However, I will find out what crew was there on that date and find out what they did.

Margaret Bishop – Fairford - We have heard a lot of talk from the agencies. It's over a year since it was acknowledged that there was a sewage risk at the East End of Fairford and we've had the Environment Agency failing to enforce the conditions and Thames Water having to go back on their word because the sewers cannot cope. What plans do Thames Water have? When is it going to happen, how much is it going to cost? The situation is not satisfactory. Flood risk is 1:15. What happens when we have a bit of a storm? Now we have a planning application for an extra 240 houses.

PC - Environment Agency – Happy to go through enforcement of conditions with my planning colleagues, and will ask what conditions were put on the planning application.

MM - Thames Water – we look at and assess the hydraulic capacity of the sewers. If the sewers can't cope due to their size then the developer will need to agree to upsize the sewers or connect to the appropriate point in the sewer network. We look at each planning application on its own merits. We cannot object purely on grounds of infiltration into our sewers. If we did this we know that the developer would probably appeal and win, with the appeal costs having to be paid by the council and potentially Thames Water.

Cllr Mark Wardle - Fairford Ward, Cotswold District Council – People have no confidence in the planning system. Sewers that can't cope is evidently not a reason to stop the planning. Photographs were taken showing the Site which will be built upon under 2-3 feet of water. Question to David Graham – you recently had a consultation on your website stating that GCC had taken on responsibility for sustainable urban drainage. Are you being consulted?

DG - GCC - Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) – if it goes ahead it will be April 2014. DEFRA hasn't yet released how funding will take place. New developments will have much more stringent conditions for surface water. The GCC will be the responsible body and will also be responsible for maintaining the conditions – covers 2 or more properties.

MW - You will be interested in what is taking place with the developer and planning authority then? The site has been under 3 foot of water.

DG – it is in everyone’s interest to get it right.

PL – I accept your frustration. We are reliant upon the technical information we get in the first place. We have a fully integrated flood plan – where they raise an objection and there is no technical reason why they should not go ahead, we cannot refuse application.

GC-B – Can I ask a technical question? Why do you not insist on a year-round percolation test to monitor?

LK - I have no power to do that. We can measure surface water over the year, however there are costs involved. I will try to get them to do it.

GC-B - Should there be a change in the law for the local authority to insist on a percolation test? What does it require? Could be problematic drainage-wise?

LK - We can’t get them to do ground water testing over a long period. Certainly needs more spirit of cooperation.

PL – You can have one set of monitoring over the wettest period of the year, however you need to have sufficient information – often the period of time they monitor does not show the reality.

Clive Elliott – With reference to sewage disposal. It seems to be easy for the developer - how far is their responsibility. If there are 170 houses – surely the system will struggle?

MM - Thames Water – They have got to prove they are not making the situation worse. Thames Water will ensure that the sewer has capacity. That’s a much more operational issue. If application is for 170 houses we would be looking at up-sizing the sewer.

GC-B – Do you take a contribution from the developer if the sewer needs upgrading? When that happens how do we know that the upgrade is carried out?

MM - Thames Water – the upgrade needs to be in place before the development is occupied.

Cllr Sandra Carter – how is communication within your organisation? I was at a meeting where a representative was concerned about a development in Moorgate. He had all the local knowledge about the area. When the planning application came in – he was not contacted. He knew nothing about the application. Thames Water hadn’t been consulted. I am concerned that there is little or no communication within TW.

MM - Thames Water –we are in daily contact with Huw Thomas with regard to all the relevant planning applications. Currently aware of all the issues in Lechlade and Fairford. Thames have recently presented in front of the council planning committee on issues of sewer infrastructure capacity and new development. The wider issue is where development will go in the future. Unfortunately Huw cannot get to every meeting as Thames Water cover over 100 local planning authorities.

Liz Sale - Thames Water – Huw is in my team. Lives in the area. He works very closely with Mark Dickinson and Mark Mathews.

TH – Very frustrated. People in Fairford and Lechlade are extremely concerned about the capacity of sewers. Thames Water is dancing around the problem. Margaret asked the question if the sewers have the capacity to cope with the new development. Have not received an acceptable answer.

AC - Thames Water – Very much depends on where the developer wants to connect. We will have the conversation with CDC.

GC-B – if you get a regular sewage problem because of the influx of ground water, how can you possibly say that a new development will not exacerbate the problem? You really need to get tougher with developers.

MM – Thames Water – All the water companies meet through the Water UK Planning Network to talk about national water and wastewater planning issues. This is chaired by MM at Thames Water and the Environmental Agency is also present. The Water UK Network have and will continue to make representations to Government on planning and infrastructure capacity. Need to highlight infiltration as a big issue. The legal view is that it is very difficult to refuse applications on just flooding, particularly in relation to infiltration.

Eric Hiscock – Kempsford Parish Council. I have been asked by the residents of Whelford, where are we with the Environment Agency re-modelling data. The application has been based on old data. Whelford has flooded several times. Can we please request that it is deferred?

PC – Environment Agency – within the Upper Thames, modelling finished in June this year. Now under internal review. Flood maps will come out shortly and will be based on new flooding information.

Sarah Basley, Fairford – re insurance. Insurance companies are not listening – the first question asked is always “has your house flooded in the last 10 years”. If your answer is “yes” then their reply is no. Same question every time. Back Lane – new map for the local area - when is this going to be done?

TH – hoping that Back Lane will be done very shortly – we have made progress. In the interim, I have a contact email address for the Environment Agency to get a letter for insurance companies until the update of the flood map.

PC – the flood map will be done in 6 months. Updated every quarter.

Stewart Thomson - The letter from the Environment Agency – I have got copies. The insurance companies are not interested – I tried it over a year ago. I have rung insurance companies. The question is always “Do you live within 100m of a river?” If the answer is yes you will not be able to change from your existing insurer. No chance of changing.

GC-B – No one should be without flood insurance. An agreement has been reached with the insurance industry. Long discussions have taken place – this involves reinsurance and involves us all paying a small levy on our insurance. If we don't have a massive flood in year one, then they will

build up a fund. I can make a document available to you. If you have any problems, please write to me.

Cllr Sue Coakley – We have touched on Moorgate. There is a great deal of frustration with Thames Water and the Environment Agency. There was no comment from the Environment Agency on the issue of Moorgate. Environment Agency – the discharge will go into Downington Ditch. Can you be certain that this application will be given due consideration? There are lots of people who this will impact on.

MW – seems to be resignation on the part of Thames Water that they can't object to anything. If you know that the system can't cope tell us and Cotswold District Council. If the sewers can't cope then we need an honest assessment to see a true picture.

MM - Thames Water – What we don't do is put in responses on planning applications that aren't appropriate and robust. For example, we can't put in objections which we know would not be a material consideration in the planning decision process and so fail to be relevant. .

GC-B – There will be another joint meeting in March. Don't as yet have a date. Let us hope we can now have some real action. I have spoken to Nick Boles, this week and will be speaking to him again. I will keep pressing on that matter.

Thank you all for coming.

Subsequent to the Meeting, it has now been decided that the Date of the Next Meeting will be on Friday 4 April 2014 from 1400-1515 pm.

