

EARNLEY PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF EARNLEY PARISH COUNCIL HELD ON 2nd JULY 2012,
WHICH COMMENCED AT 7.00PM, AT ST PETER'S CHURCH ROOM

PRESENT: Cllrs Chris Bayley (Chairman), Colin Field (Vice Chairman), Sandy Simpson and Bob Norris

In attendance: Mrs Louise Chater (Clerk), County Cllr Pieter Montyn, Gordon Wilson (Senior Team Leader, The Environment Agency), District Cllr John Conner (Cabinet Member for Environment Chichester District Council), County Cllr Pieter Montyn, Stuart Smith (Highways Commissioning Manager, West Sussex County Council), Cllr Cobbard (Vice Chair Birdham Parish Council) and 33 members of public, as per signing in log.

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and expressed his sympathy to all those who had suffered from the flooding. He thanked them for attending and requested that everybody sign in to ensure that information could be distributed following the meeting.

The Chairman advised that the Parish Council currently had a vacancy and any resident who wished to be considered for the position should contact the Clerk Louise Chater or the Chairman. The Council intended to interview and co-opt at the next full council meeting, on 19th July 2012.

73.12 APOLOGIES AND REASONS FOR ABSENCE

District Councillor Peter Clementson – prior commitment
District Cllr Grahame Barrett – illness

74.12 CODE OF CONDUCT

On a proposal by the Chairman, it was RESOLVED that Earnley Parish Council would continue to use the Code of Conduct, adopted on 8th May 2007, until such times as Chichester District Council issued a revised Code. The Clerk requested all Councillors complete and return to the Clerk the new register of interest form within 28 days.

ALL

There were no declarations of interest on items included on the agenda.

75.12 FLOODING IN THE PARISH OF EARNLEY - PRESENTATION BY GORDON WILSON, ENVIRONMENT AGENCY.

Gordon Wilson reported that the rain monitor in North Mundham registered 101mm in 24 hours (the average rainfall is 45/50 mm per month). Effectively, the area received two months of rainfall in a 24 hours period. Although it is no comfort to those who had been affected locally, this was not an isolated incident and there were similar issues in Felpham and Bognor, due to the volume of the water that fell in such a short period of time.

Gordon stated that on 9th June 2012 flood guidance issued by the Met Office stated that there was a low risk of flooding.

On the morning of the 10th June 2012 the Met Office issued guidance for the south east which once again stated a low risk of flooding. In the afternoon the Met Office reissued guidance of low risk of flooding. At 9.50pm the Met Office issued guidance to expect 30mm of rain over the next 24 hour period and an Amber flood warning was issued. At 10pm the Environment Agency opened an incident room.

Crews were dispatched to carry out weed screen clearance and clear culverts that had been reported as blocked. Pumps were dispatched to the outfall at Medmerry to

enable water to be pumped out at high tide when the tidal flap was closed. The decision was taken that the pumps would continue 24 hours a day; this made a significant difference. On Tuesday 12th June the decision was taken to breach the bund at Medmerry.

The Environment Agency was aware that concern had been expressed that the re-alignment work on the defences caused additional flooding in the area, due to the temporary diversion whilst the work was being completed. The Agency was also aware that residents had stated that once the bund had been breached the water disappeared immediately. The contractors broke through the embankment on three separate occasions, enlarging the breach each time, until the flood water began to subside, by which time the breach was 10 metres wide.

Mr Wilson stated that the huge volume of water travelling down the rife was restricted at various locations due to culverts, and this caused the water to back up and breach the rife. In his view the work at Medmerry had not caused the problems. The Agency, however, were in the process of instructing independent consultants to carry out an extensive review of the scheme and the way it had been constructed. The report would be made public in due course.

Mr Wilson said that the Environment Agency currently produced flood maps for river flooding, and were currently undertaking work on mapping surface water flooding. He stated that West Sussex County Council was the lead local flood authority and they would be required to develop a flood strategy for surface water flooding to assist residents in preparing for this sort of event.

STUART SMITH, WEST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL.

Mr Smith said the Flood Water Management Act came in as a result of the flooding in 2004 and responsibility had recently been transferred to West Sussex County Council. As the Lead Local Flood Authority the County Council was responsible for the strategic overview and management of drainage.

In the current situation it was the County Council's role to work with and coordinate all the agencies, initiate the investigation to establish exactly what happened and ensure lessons were learnt. To this end questionnaires had been sent out and information was being gathered. The report would be published upon completion and be open for public debate.

The County Council had a 'Community Flood Prevention Fund' and the Manhood was a high priority with the County Council and Southern Water. The community and various agencies need to work with landowners to ensure the whole drainage system worked effectively.

76.12 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME ON MATTERS ON THE AGENDA

Q. What was the time frame for the investigations?

A. It would take several months, the County Council hope that interim feedback would be available shortly.

Q: The crucial question that needs to be asked was whether the existence of the re-alignment scheme affected the flooding?

A: Gordon responded: We need to wait for the investigation. It was his personal opinion that if the scheme had not commenced the affect would have been the same, due to the amount of rain water that fell in such a short space of time. The work on the temporary culvert was carried out in November and, although we had a very dry winter, April was very wet and the work had no adverse effect.

Q: Could the hole not have been made earlier?

A: Possibly.

Q: Were the pipes there as a permanent measure?

A: No, they were a temporary measure whilst the work was carried out. When the land had settled the permanent, much larger, culvert would be installed. If you built the culvert in initially, it would put the bank at risk of sinking and compromising the culvert in future. The investigation would be reviewing if the construction plan was correct.

Q: The water storage area was too small if it can't cope with the water in June.

A: The water storage area was only partially constructed, and would be sufficient when it was completed.

Q: Why wasn't it completed before the work on the bank started?

A: The site had a twelve month construction plan and the work was carried out in a specific order. The investigation would assess whether this was correct.

Q: Following the weather reports late Sunday evening and early Monday morning, why was the hole not put in on Monday?

A: We need to wait until the investigation has been completed to ascertain whether breaching the bank had a significant impact.

A resident stated that within a few hours of the break through the level of water dropped significantly outside his property, to a level that would have meant water would not have entered. The breach should have been done earlier.

Q: Was the pipe monitored 24 hours a day?

A: No, it was monitored by the contractors and the sluice gates wardens.

A member of the public stated that the Medmerry Scheme should not increase the fluvial flood risk.

Gordon Wilson responded that the scheme was designed as a coastal protection scheme and a requirement was that it did not increase the fluvial flood risk. When the diversion channel adjacent to Earnley Manor Close had been completed it could potentially improve the situation in Bookers Lane. The scheme was not designed to alleviate the flood risk in Bookers Lane. As residents of Bookers Lane were aware the Environment Agency had worked with the residents to investigate a flood prevention scheme. However, the scheme would cost more than £400,000 and this was prohibitive. Now that the Environment Agency had evidence of property flooding the scheme potential could be reviewed, although partnership funding would be required.

A resident stated this was the fourth time his house in Bookers Lane had been flooded and the damage that had been caused in the area by this incident would amount to more than £400,000.

A resident stated that he was encouraged by comments made with regard to the potential review of the scheme in Bookers Lane. He was concerned, however, that the water level in the rife had not reduced significantly, and if the area experienced further rainfall he was concerned that further flooding would occur.

Q: Who was responsible for conducting a survey of the rife so it could be ascertained the pinch points and the areas that need clearing?

A: Gordon stated that the basic annual maintenance cut took place in September. If further work was required then a case would need to be made for this work to be carried out. Although they were not responsible for the culverts in Almodington it had

been agreed that the Environment Agency would inspect them when performing the annual maintenance. Stuart Smith stated the County Council would be responsible for producing the surface water management plan, however, this was a long term project as funding would need to be obtained to carry out any work identified in the plan.

Q: We are aware that stretches of the rife are the responsibility of private landowners. How would they be made to do their duty and maintain the ditches and which authority is able to carry out enforcement to ensure the work was being carried out?

A: Stuart Smith stated that the legislation had changed with the Act and it was now a County Council function. The Act did not provide for funding for enforcement action. The County Council was currently working with Chichester District Council to work out the process to ensure that enforcement was carried out. Due to the difficulties in successful enforcement proceedings against things that had been in place for a long time, peer pressure would be very important. The Community Flood Fund was available to help get ditches repaired.

Q: It had been stated that every culvert reduced the flow of water. Was there some design criteria, as surely the ditch and culvert should be the same size? Why were the culverts so small?

A: Gordon responded: Most of the culverts were installed a long time ago, some legally and some illegally. If you started now then, yes, you would ensure that the pipe work was larger and more suitable for the job. Most of the culverts were private landowner's responsibility and the Environment Agency did not have the power to enforce action to change the pipe size of established culverts.

Gordon provided his email address Gordon.Wilson@environment-agency.gov.uk, although he requested all residents who had experienced flooding to report it via SSDRecovery@ea.gov.uk where all reported cases would be logged to provide a comprehensive picture of the events.

A resident stated that 'rogue traders' had moved into the area and were approaching people whose homes were damaged, and requested residents be vigilant and report them to the police.

The Chairman reminded all present that the next meeting of the Parish Council was to take place on 19th July 2012 at Bracklesham Barn.

Signed: _____ Chairman to Earnley Parish Council Dated: 19th July 2012