

Cirencester Flood Meeting

Council Chamber, Cotswold District Council

18th October 2013

Attendees:

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown – MP (GC-B)
Sir Edward Horsfall – Chairman of Cotswold District Council
Cllr Shaun Parsons – County Councillor for South Cotswolds (SP)
Cllr David Fowles – Portfolio Holder for the Environment, Cotswold District Council (DF)
Cllr Sue Jepson, County Councillor for Campden-Vale (SJ)
Cllr Joe Harris – Mayor of Cirencester
Anthony Crawford – Head of Waste Water Networks, Thames Water (AC)
Chris Savage – Flood risk Management Team leader, Environment Agency (CS)
Ralph Young - Director, Cotswold District Council (RY)
Laurence King – Flood Defence Engineer, Cotswold District Council (LK)
Claire Lock – Head of Environmental Services, Cotswold District Council (CL)
David Graham – Flood Risk Management Team, Gloucestershire County Council (DG)
Scott Macaulay-Lowe – Local Highways Manager, Gloucestershire Highways (SM-L)
Philippa Lowe, Head of Planning, Cotswold District Council
Jamie Walton, Community Services Manager, Cirencester Town Council
Martin Conyers, Estate Services Manager, Cirencester Town Council

Agenda:

1. Welcome
2. To receive apologies
3. Reports from representatives from the Environment Agency
4. Reports from the County Council/Cotswold District Council/Town Council
5. Reports from Thames Water
6. Questions invited from Members of the Public
7. Close

1. Welcome

GC-B – Welcome to everyone. We have representatives from all the relevant agencies and will ask them to introduce themselves.

David Graham – Gloucestershire County Council

GCC is the co-ordinating authority. Local over-arching role - have the responsibility for trying to reduce flooding. Flood risk management strategy – you should be aware of this, if not the consultation is still open and this is your last chance today to have your say. I will leave a summary document today outlining what the strategy is all about. Inside is a questionnaire and I would appreciate if you could return your comments to us asap.

As the lead authority, we have been very concerned and have been liaising with the Environment Agency, Thames Water and the town council. We have fairly recently set up a multi- agency group which looks at each area which is being worst hit by flooding and what each of the agencies are doing. Report back to government on an annual basis. We are quite satisfied that each agency is involved and looking at the problems.

Chris Savage – Environment Agency

I am the Flood Risk Management Team Leader covering the Cotswolds. We experienced exceptionally high ground water levels from July to February – 4 levels above average. We are now on the lower level and so we are in a much better situation this year.

Churn strategy – looks at managing flood risk over the next 100 years. We have delivered all the immediate works, including flood defences in Watermoor. We have looked back at the Churn Strategy and what has been provided in Cirencester is the best we could deliver. However, need to look at individual properties. This is something we are going to take forward and look at it more detail. We will be progressing that over the next few months.

Operationally – we have done the annual run through of Gumstool Brook. Surveyed Cecily Hill culvert , which runs under the main town itself - completed in its entirety. There are no blockages, no structural issues. Small maintenance jobs to be completed. Spittlegate Lane culvert – attempted the survey on that and encountered contaminated silt – would suggest an issue with the sewer. Thames Water will be fixing that later this year – planned for 2nd December. Dealing with the town council on their community response plan and working with CDC in their emergency response capacity. Regional flooding and coastal commission – have made money available for emergency and will help to deliver equipment to support the Town Council.

Anthony Crawford – Thames Water - 2nd December is the correct date. When we were last here we made some commitments. Two main thrusts – 1) to look at the long term solution for this catchment and 2) to deal with the immediate or tactical solutions that will make an impact over this winter.

The long term solution requires us to undertake extensive modelling to understand our network. Following that we will be making submissions to our regulator to obtain funding. We made the commitment to start the work after the water in our sewers had reached proper levels – we have undertaken our modelling and this will be completed by spring 2014.

We have tried to identify immediate tactical actions to prevent problems – for example we have put depth monitors in Hereward Road and Siddington. Also manhole cover sealing in the upstream catchment, Blake Road and Hereward Road. This will have a direct impact on helping to prevent sewer flooding. Will be installing a penstock to impact Hereward Road and Blake Road – this will enable us to isolate those two roads from high risk. That is being undertaken now. Following on from the work they did in the culvert – more remedial work is scheduled for the sewer in December.

Other issues – complaints surrounding our response over the winter period. Criticism was mainly that we didn't respond properly. Have put a number of things into place with our contractors. Our ability to respond quicker is greater than last year.

We were faced last year with ground water getting into the sewers – they are not designed to be completely water tight and we have tried to address that. We may need to reline some of the sewers or we may need to get another solution but will not know that until spring next year. The commitment is there.

Claire Lock – Cotswold District Council

Council role is three-fold. 1) Dealing with the key agencies on pressing issues – Thames Water and the Environment Agency, etc. District Council will continue to work and support those agencies to ensure solutions are found for various problems. 2) Community Resilience - A number of my colleagues are working with the Town Council to boost community resilience. 3) Planning - my colleague Phillipa Lowe is here to help if you have any questions.

Phillipa Lowe – Cotswold District Council

We get involved in two main areas. When we get a planning application we liaise with Thames Water and the Environment Agency. The schemes are evaluated with regard to impact on the network. Also involved with long term planning – there was a recent consultation looking at 20 years planning across the district. There are a number of key documents – including the Infrastructure Delivery Plan. Those studies will be evaluated to see if we need to do any more modelling before it takes place.

Scott Macaulay-Lowe – Local Highways Manager, Gloucestershire Highways

Brief update now – but do come to me afterwards if you have any specific questions. Remit is highway drainage/gullies and to respond where necessary to the reports coming re the culverts. If there is anything we can do from a highways point of view we will. We have done all our routine maintenance. For those who live in Spittlegate, Hereward and Blake – they will see a jetting to clear the drains. Spittlegate will be closed when Thames Water do the work - this will be a good dry run for the closure, in case we experience flooding like last year.

Shaun Parsons

Can we speak about Siddington as it was not mentioned much last year? Very serious sewage issues in Cherry Tree Drive and Siddington Road. Every year 75 homes suffer with sewage problems. Also flooded internally. Please, Thames Water, can you get your facts correct – you said that it was an external problem. This has been going on for years.

Planning issues – 25 extra houses have been agreed – if the system can't cope now how will they be able to cope with extra houses. There is a high water table, the Churn floods regularly.

Emergency response times – very slow. People are very concerned about what to do in an emergency.

GC-B – this is the single most concentrated problem in the area. If they have their analysis wrong how are they going to find a solution?

AC – the problem was internal flooding. An incorrect letter was written. How do we address the issues on the network? There are issues with a private pumping station and we need to be able to work with the owners. We need to continue our investigations -will talk to the council.

Planning application for 55 houses – we have made presentation through planning that there may be issues with the network.

Mark Mathews – Thames Water

We made representation made to CDC. The planning application was won on appeal.

GC-B – Can I introduce Joe Harris – Mayor of Cirencester.

Joe Harris

Can I pass you over to Town Council Officers. Earlier this year we adopted an emergency response team. We have bought a large gazebo where people can come along to get supplies in an emergency - sandbags, torches, blankets. Have also produced an information leaflet for residents.

Cirencester is split into 5 different wards – currently working on 5 individual plans – Watermoor, Siddington, Beeches, Stratton, etc. If you would like to be a volunteer I will be passing around a sheet if you can put your name and address.

Martin Conyers

Town has now formed a flood group. Under the Thames bylaws we cannot legally back up water and must let it go down stream. As part of our Emergency Response team we now have a map of where sandbags should be deployed. The Town Council regularly checks with the Environment Agency concerning the sluice gates.

GC-B – can I congratulate you, Joe, and your councillors for the work you have done. I will now open the meeting to questions.

Geoffrey Lloyd - consulting engineer.

I said at the last meeting that I have no confidence in the Environment Agency. Could I refer to their management strategy document? Can I ask if there is any likelihood if the work is to be done any earlier? Maybe a 1:30 chance?

CS – as you've identified, it is very frustrating that there is a technically viable solution and then we are not able to go ahead. Unfortunately the costs outweigh the benefits. If it is due to the impact of climate change the benefits of the scheme then increases. Whilst we can't fund it, if the community is able to fund it locally then we will offer our expertise. Whilst it sits in the funding for 2030 – if those impacts arrive sooner the funding will come sooner.

Geoffrey Lloyd – I think the Environment Agency have not come up with a reasonably costed proposal. Every time I raise that issue I get no answers. The best thing that could happen is if the business areas or Tesco flooded – then something would happen.

Brian Barnes – Churn Catchment flood prevention group. Would like to congratulate Town Council Officers. I would like to put forward a suggestion that we extend this plan so it covers all of the Churn catchment. We have small rural pockets along the catchment who can benefit - from Colesbourne to Cerney Wick. Needs expanding – if we have common strategy it makes sense.

Anthony Webster – most concerned about the area of Cherry Tree Drive and the caravan park. Would like to thank Shaun Parsons. Have been writing to Thames Water since 1999 – when we first started having sewage discharging into Cherry Tree Drive. Has become increasingly worse. One of the street gullies is now going into the Churn. In 2008, when Rose Way had a serious flood, the water had come from the Love Lane. What caused that particular flooding issue? Looking at the flood plain maps over the years, Cherry Tree Drive was initially on a flood plain, then it was put in a semi protected area, now we are back in a flood plain. Affects house insurance, etc. Never had a satisfactory answer from Thames Water.

CS – this is one to do with surface water risk. When looking at flood mapping – current information is the best available information and this obviously showed part of Cherry Tree drive was prone to flooding. The insurance industry generate their own bespoke plans and you can get varying views from different insurance companies. Government are still working with the Association of British Insurers.

GC-B – Chris is referring to an agreement 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 a Reinsurance fund will be built up. I can make a document available to you. Can you deal with the flooding issue of cherry tree drive? This is a longstanding issue – 15 years.

AC – this falls into the area of long-term strategy – will not be able to resolve it overnight. Can we talk about it afterwards to deal with the issues with the private pumping station? If it's a surface water pumping problem, then it is my problem. I would like to deal with Mr Webster direct as he has not received a satisfactory answer.

Joe Morris – I am concerned about the communication with your local residents. I find it very hard to get an answer. How are you going to communicate with your customers? We were told that a large pump was meant to be stored in the local area – where?

AC – issue of communication – we recognise we could do better. In terms of updating our longer term plans – we have been able to communicate out through the properties affected and the local community.

Joe Morris – are you going to communicate the works happening on the 2nd December?

GC-B – can we work out a better way to communicate with local people?

AC - The work we are doing at Spittlegate will prevent the need for the pump.

David Fowles – we were able to use the town newsletter.

Patrick Moynahan – Gloucester Street. The long term solution is an upstream solution. Can we know what those costs are?

CA – upstream project - cost is approx £2m to develop that. There is no individual budget for the area – when flooding occurs there is a project budget allocated. Benefits must outweigh the costs. We receive funding from DEFRA – I have yet to see a project 100% funded from DEFRA. Extra must come from local businesses.

GC-B - could it be that a locally delivered solution could be done at a lower cost.

LK – the costing for the local scheme for individual property level protection is 5k per dwelling. It will be significantly cheaper and give better protection for many properties currently only protected up to a 1:30 event. We would love to see a scheme upstream created, but that will be much more expensive per house protected.

Russell Rogers – we've heard that the water must be allowed to flow. There are two things that could be done to maximise the flow of the river Churn. 1) You need to cut the banks of vegetation and 2) the Spittlegate Road Bridge –it was reinforced with a big chunk of concrete and it doesn't take much of a rise in the river to flood. All it needs is for the bed to be dug out. That could be done immediately.

CA – 1) vegetation management – we do some. However it is the riparian responsibility. More work is planned for next year. I will feedback that it hasn't been done for 2 years back to the team. 2) Spittlegate Road Bridge – if you just dig a hole underneath it then you will just create a sump. The river will find its own level. Shall we talk afterwards about maintenance?

GC-B – could you show me the photo showing one year's growth?

Joe Morris – just before I was voted – I understand there was a 5-year biodiversity plan.

GC-B – there is a conflict between biodiversity and flooding. Could you pass it back to your authority, Chris, that flooding is more important than biodiversity.

Tony Curry – Park Ward – this meeting has shown that there is a lack of joined up thinking. What really concerns me is that the authorities are not thinking together. How are you going to handle the sewage for the extra houses? Before you go any further with schemes – tell us as residents what you are going to do with sewage, roads, drainage, etc.

Christopher Arnold – Blake Road. Environment Agency we had a 30 year wait – we all know that cost/benefit analysis can be skewed. The nursing home – toilets didn't work during the flood. Lots of benefit potential – I would query the whole methodology. Surely it should be drainage before development. I don't think we should have any more development.

CA – I do understand – this is a very emotive issue, but we have very strict criteria in order to carry out that process. We want to help every community.

GC-B – Philippa – I don't think you, as a council, have sufficient strategy.

PL – the strategy will include that they will be requiring more modelling before the planning can go ahead. The size of the sewer is capable of dealing with the development. The problem is when you get infiltration into the sewer. When you are looking at a green field site they need to come up with a green field drainage technique. Thames Water has said that the sewage system has capacity.

GC-B – surely, if you have high ground water levels, and the sewage system can't cope in a period of high water, then this is a problem?

PL – the development itself doesn't add to that problem.

Martin Jones – we frequently do new developments. If the local authority is on the ball then it will not affect capacity. If the sewers are infiltrated then that is the local authority's problem. Regarding the cost of the upstream flood prevention scheme - if it comes down to 1.5m – at what point does it become viable?

CA – those costs are realistic for delivering flood schemes. Need to scope it, design it. We always come up against significant land costs. It would be good if people would give up their land

Rick Williams – address this to Thames Water. My garden backs onto Greasy Joe's truck car park. Thames Water put a new sewer pipe through my garden and it was supposed to be just for the Kingshill South development. However, all the sewage from the centre of Cirencester and Stratton comes through my garden. Raw sewage bubbles up in the garden. Toilet paper, etc. In the Spring I came to the meeting. I gave you (AC) a letter and you said you would deal with it. No reply. I have written 6 other letters and have only received one acknowledgment. The pipe is not big enough. Because it only happens in winter, I assume surface water is getting into the pipe.

AC – I apologise for this not being dealt with. I can think of some solutions. Can we speak afterwards?

GC-B – Mr Williams - can you send me your correspondence. I will write to the Chairman personally.

Shaun Parsons – Mr Williams - can you raise an official complaint. I will meet with you afterwards.

On the cost/benefit – we can give some support so they can demonstrate where there is a big problem. If you do get a questionnaire – please fill them in. Thames Water and the Environment Agency will then have the weight of evidence – more likely they will get something done.

AC – I think we can get all questionnaires out in a couple of weeks.

GC-B – can I ask of the agencies for you to work to get the costs down? Although £1m is a lot of money it is not a lot per head.

David Graham – a lot has been said about surface water run-off. Looks like the flood water management act – SUDS – (Sustainable Drainage Systems) will be implemented in April 2014. That will have a significant change on the way new developments are drained. It means that they will not be able to put their surface water into the sewers. All of this will help to reduce surface water run-off from new developments.

Irene Bartlett – Spittlegate. I have lived through 3 floods – each one is getting worse. There are 87 flats, all who pay £1000 council tax. Every time we have a flood the ground floor flats have sewage coming into their kitchen sinks and they are not able to use the toilet. All the drains are coming up – manhole covers come up. First flood was in 2001 – has been happening since then. Ages of residents vary from 75 to 106. There was no way they could get into Trafalgar Road during the floods last year. I have had to call the council to open up Gooseacre . Carers had to walk through

the flood to get there. One of the residents put a pump in and worked over Christmas to clear the water.

AC – the problem is driven by the river flooding. Volume was beyond the capacity of our sewers. Our response is to have a larger tanker fleet – response will be better this year. It's clearly the Thames Water sewers that flood and I appreciate that it is our problem. We need to make them more resilient.

GC-B – what a nonsense it makes when they talk about biodiversity. If there is ever a conflict between flooding and biodiversity, people's homes must come first.

Town Resident – Thank you GC-B. Can I pick up 2 points please? Can I mention all the problems they have in Berkeley Road. We know what the cost is – how do we weigh those dis-benefits against the benefits that the Environment Agency have to use. Final comment – you said that £1m is not a great sum – Cirencester people pay £1,000 a year. £1m would mean that it would need to be increased by 100%.

GC-B – I chose my words very carefully. I meant that £1m is a small price to pay for the residents of Cirencester. May I thank everyone for coming? It has been a constructive meeting. I urge the agencies to find a solution.

There will be another meeting in March. No specific date as yet but it will be advertised as soon as it is finalised.

Subsequent to the Meeting, it has now been decided that the Date of the Next Meeting will be on Friday 4 April 2014 from 1130-1300 pm.