

Note of meeting held at St Michael's First School, Weavers Lane, Stone on Monday 27th September 2004, commencing at 7 p.m.

Present: John Wakefield, County Councillor from Stone (Chair); Colin Low, Head of Operational Services, Staffs County Council; John Sly, Divisional Engineer, Staffs County Council; Peter Reilly, Environment Agency; Jeremy Slann, John Whitehouse and Nigel Holmes, Aston Lodge Residents' Flood Association; 71 members of the public.

Apologies were received from Chris Hindle, Head of Planning and Engineering, Stafford Borough Council and Paul Gregory, Assistant Manager, Severn Trent Water.

John Wakefield opened the meeting by reviewing the recent experiences of storm water flooding and explained that the purpose of the meeting was to share knowledge on the causes and extent of the problems, to learn of any shortcomings in the responses by public agencies and, chiefly, to work towards a coordinated strategy for handling future storms.

Agency representatives present were invited to explain their current roles and make suggestions for improved future storm management.

Colin Low (Staffs CC) provided a brief overview of the public authorities. The County Council was responsible for the road drainage system and culverts under highways and associated connections.

Stafford Borough Council (not able to be represented at this meeting) were the 'Drainage Authority' within the terms of the Land Drainage Act and had reserve powers but not obligations to act.

Severn Trent Water (also not able to be present) has responsibility for both foul and storm water sewers and dealt with cleaning/disinfecting work following any discharges from their systems.

The various agencies had specific responsibilities but all aspects of the drainage system were interrelated. He referred to the development of joint working among agencies and wanted to see progress and improvement.

John Sly (Staffs CC) reviewed recent experience in the area and problems encountered with blocked watercourses. The key legal responsibilities for drainage lay with riparian owners and there was a need to advise them.

Peter Reilly (Environment Agency) explained his role with "main rivers", which in Stone meant the River Trent and a short section of the Scotch Brook from its confluence with the Trent. The Agency also dealt with other "critical watercourses". Their responsibilities were changing and increasing in Autumn 2004. Specifically, where it could be demonstrated that more than 25 properties per bank per kilometre of watercourse had suffered flood damage, the Agency could define the section as 'critical'. The Agency was currently active in Stone reviewing evidence and with a view to taking responsibility for a greater length of the Scotch Brook.

Jeremy Slann (Aston Lodge Residents' Flood Association) outlined the local 'self-help' work that the organisation had done in contacting affected residents and in compiling a detailed database of flood damage. He reviewed the causes and direction of recent floods for the benefit of the agencies present.

The meeting then heard from local residents who provided detailed information of local problems, especially areas of repeated flooding over time, and of apparent contributory causes. Notes were taken of all locations identified in the debate.

The extent and severity of local flooding was made clear. Repeated demands were made that better and proactive flood prevention measures should be put in place by the public agencies.

It was agreed:

that all of the relevant agencies should share a detailed database of local flood problems. The Aston Lodge Residents Flood Association (ALRFA) possessed the most detailed current local information and it was suggested that local residents provide any additional information to them

ALRFA agreed to continue to compile data, including a large scale local map, and to share that information with the agencies

that the public agencies should work to achieve a joint flood management strategy

The public agreed an agenda for coordinated action.

Required action points:

In the short term:

- Inspection of all existing drains, sewers and watercourses
- Intensification of work on unblocking and cleaning drains at problem locations
- Detailed investigation of sites of flooding in people's homes to prevent recurrence. Key sites to be addressed as identified at the meeting and noted on ALRFA database
- Any gaps or inadequacies in data to be identified and steps taken to complete database including appointment of specialist external consultants as required
- The various drainage agencies to hold joint flood management meetings and reach agreement on 'lead roles' for work
- Enhanced and changing roles to be clarified including extension of Environment Agency responsibilities and designation of 'critical watercourses'
- Information and advice to be provided to the public, especially riparian owners, on responsibilities and flood mitigation measures

In the medium term:

- Drainage agencies to agree areas of responsibility and joint working
- Implementation of flood mitigation measures in identified problem locations
- Development of plan to increase the flood-handling capacity of the local drainage system to include, specifically, a balancing pond on agricultural land adjoining Aston Lodge
- Flood management policy to be closely tied to planning and development systems, ensuring systematic use of full drainage information and conditions in planning permissions and production of local development frameworks
- Provision of information to the public on flood risks and development of single point of contact to deal with problems

In the longer term:

- Fund and implement area drainage system with greater capacity to cope with future extreme weather conditions
- Maintain comprehensive record of total drainage system and make available to all relevant bodies
- Monitor operation of the drainage systems and plan improvements as required

John Wakefield undertook to distribute notes on points of agreement to all those present and to representatives of all the public drainage authorities and relevant landowners. He would monitor and report back to local residents on progress being made.

Thanks were expressed to the officers who had given their time to attend the meeting and for the work that had been done during and since the local floods.

The meeting recorded its gratitude for the hard work and commitment of Jeremy Slann, John Whitehouse and Nigel Holmes in compiling information, forming ALRFA and leading the local campaign for improved flood prevention.

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