

South Cerney Flood Meeting  
South Cerney Village Hall  
2pm - 14<sup>th</sup> March 2013

Attendees:

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown – MP (GC-B)  
Chris Savage – Flood Risk Management Team Leader, Environment Agency (CS)  
Ian Tomes – Flood Risk Manager, Environment Agency (IT)  
David Fowles – Portfolio Holder for the Environment, Cotswold District Council (DF)  
Clive Bennett, District Councillor for South Cerney (CB)  
Shaun Parsons – County Councillor for South Cotswolds (SP)  
Anthony Crawford – Head of Waste Water Networks, Thames Water (AC)  
Jeff Brown – Waste Water Network, Thames Water (JB)  
Karen Nelson – Field Services Manager (KN)  
Simon Shannon – Thames Water Customer Service (SS)  
Huw Thomas – Government Liaison Team – Thames Water (HT)  
Kate Bishop – Head of Public Protection and Emergency Planning, Cotswold District Council (KB)  
Laurence King – Flood Defence Engineer, Cotswold District Council (LK)  
Phillipa Lowe – Head of Environmental Services, Cotswold District Council (PL)  
Claire Lock – Head of Environmental Services, Cotswold District Council (CL)  
David Graham – Flood Risk Management Team, Gloucestershire County Council (DG)  
David Lesser – Flood Risk Management Team, Gloucestershire County Council (DL)  
Mike Stewart – Chairman of South Cerney Parish Council (MS)  
Scott Macaulay-Lowe – Local Highways Manager, Gloucestershire Highways (SM-L)  
Anita Russell – Business Manager, Bromford Support (AR)  
Andrew Phillips – Bromford (AP)

Agenda:

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

Welcome

- A very warm welcome to all of you and our Councillors. A great thank you to Mike, Chairman of the Parish Council as coordinator. Thank you very much indeed for your organisation.
- I came to South Cerney with Shaun Parsons and Clive Bennett just after Christmas where I was sadly able to see the devastation caused by water flooding and sewage. We decided that something serious needed to be

done not only for the short term but more importantly for the longer term.

- This is the first of a series of meetings, a process that I have adopted in other areas. I organise all the agencies to come together, which takes a huge amount of work from my office.
- I will reverse the agenda and ask the representatives to speak first and I will then ask for members of the public to have their say. Please fill out the attendance sheets being circulated and state your name prior to asking a question or making a statement.
- We will be taking verbatim minutes today to record all actions and hold another meeting in the near future to ensure they have been completed. This process has worked for other towns and conditions have been considerably improved.

#### Apologies

- No apologies

#### Reports from representatives from the Environment Agency

Chris Savage:

- 2012 was a strange year for weather and not the first time flooding has happened in this area but it was different from the occurrence in 2007. I will give you a bit of background on how it unfolded and then go on to a bit about what we've done prior to that.
- The year started in drought and then we went through a whole period of constant rain coming through culminating in the events of November and December. During 19<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> November over 100ml rain fell in the Cotswold area.
- In comparison, the 2007 event was 140ml in a 24 hour period. The key difference this time round was that it was prolonged rain, which had the effect of built up ground water levels - there wasn't one single storm that caused the flooding.
- The ground water levels were very high which kept the river levels high. Caused flooding issues.
- From the EA perspective we put together churn risk management strategy after the 2007 floods which looks at Cirencester, Siddington and South Cerney to work out how we manage the flood risk and reduce it going forward.
- Put together an action plan covering short, medium and long-term actions to reduce the risk. In South Cerney that was to do with removing three service pipes or crossings across the river which caused constriction to the river's flow. Working with the owners of the weir to ensure that the conditions improve and that they know how to operate them. Those were the key things we have delivered over the last five year period.

Ian Tomes:

- The strategy developed was intended to last 5 years. In view of what has happened we will review the strategy earlier than anticipated.

- The important thing is that we will look at other approaches to reduce the flood risk. There was a lot we could do that was viable and we have looked at individual products that have come a long way, these will help individual cases.
- We have looked at the railway embankment and increased capacity, need to be satisfied that we are not impacting down-stream communities. We then need to work with the Gloucestershire Council to make the works more permanent.

GCB: We all know what the Environment Agency does but the audience may not, could you fill us in?

IT: The Environment Agency are responsible for main river and local authorities have responsibility for all new water courses. Thames Water are responsible for the sewer network. Gloucestershire County Council responsibility as lead local flood authority, coordinate all local bodies.

GCB: In terms of South Cerney, which rivers are you responsible for and how far?

IT: We cover the churn all through SC and beyond Cirencester. The EA covers all South Cerney waterways.

GCB: What do you mean by "maintenance".

IT: Having responsibility for main river does not mean that we have responsibility for maintaining the main river. That responsibility lies with the land-owner. We have a certain amount of public funding for this and in serious cases we will attend to it if it is going to effect a large number of people.

Member of the public: Do you mean Cerney Wick as well? We are part of the Parish and we were flooded too.

IT: Yes, sorry, you as well.

### Reports from Thames Water

Anthony Crawford:

- Thames Water were very close to announcing a drought back in March last year but in May the heavens opened and 200% of the average rain fall fell in May.
- We found that across the whole of our network we suffered with inundation of the networks themselves. Ground water levels became very high.
- Sewers that were built to cope with sewage and waste water were filling with ground water. They are not designed to be water tight so ground water will get in.
- This is the problem we had in South Cerney and lots of other villages. It puts a lot of strain on the network and starts to come back out of the man holes. Sewage then begins to spill out onto the road, into peoples'

gardens and in worst cases into people's properties. I understand how traumatic this must have been.

- From Thames Water's perspective, we get on average 5,000 calls per week regarding waste etc and this peaked at 9,000. We had all of our workforce mobilised over the Christmas period and hired every possible tanker to assist in managing the network. There were cases where despite our efforts we could not keep up with the volume of infiltration.
- It was an exceptional year for us and we dealt with the events to the best of our ability. We do recognise that we haven't got it as right as we could do. From a very open perspective, if that has meant that we haven't responded quickly enough or delivered our promises of tankers and draining I am very sorry.
- Fundamentally the network is capable of dealing with the village's surface and sewage. In exceptional circumstances we have to commit to dealing with the infiltration issues and what we can do in the longer term.
- The network is designed to do what it is designed to do. We will look at the longer-term plans.

#### Reports from County Council / Cotswold District Council / Town Council

David Graham:

- The introduction of the Water Management Act made us the lead local flood authority. The Environment Agency has described that they are responsible for certain aspects of the main river. For the County Council it meant that we had to produce a strategy to deal with surface water.
- That means a massive change for the CC to have these responsibilities, at this moment all of the act isn't in place yet. Since 2007 the CC has worked hard to involve ourselves closely with partner agencies and it's fair to say that we've done quite a good job.
- We have put in place over 160 multi-agency schemes since 2008, putting money into both EA larger schemes (flooding from main rivers) and parish / town level.
- Here in South Cerney we are working closely with the EA to work on what the modelling will produce.
- The lead is with the EA. The railway embankment belongs to the CC so we have an interest as a land-owner.
- The process of modelling: In order to do anything to alleviate flooding you need quite a bit of money. Even a small scheme costs £10,000-£100,000.
- The current government scheme is partnership funding. Unless you can get contributions to what you want to do, it won't happen. We do look to see who benefits from the scheme. These things are so expensive that the government can't spend public funding on it. The CC are classed as external distributors. It will be the same whatever we try to do here.
- Property protection is an expensive item as well – we may need to look at central funding from DEFRA. The way forward is probably more in the way of property protection rather than a larger engineering scheme in the future.

## Highways:

Scott Macaulay-Lowe:

- The open gullies that are there to take the surface water off the road are the responsibility of the highways as are culvert crossings. The closures at South Cerney, Siddington and Preston Toll Bar lasted longer than we had hoped. Police request a road closure when there is highway flooding and we do what we can.
- Our highway systems are designed to take what comes out of the sky and hits the road. When we get considerable run off or flooding those systems can't cope which is what you saw in November. It wouldn't have been helped if there were materials or debris in those gullies. We do maintain them but don't check them as regularly as we used to. We are pleased with how the gullies are working in this area.
- We will be working on the Upper Up culvert that runs across properties to check that it is running and make sure we haven't got any significant breaks or damage.
- The upgrading of a highway system won't be happening as we do not have the funds. Having a system that is clear and running satisfies me that we can keep the water off the road. We still have people moving the traffic cones to get through but we can't prevent that.
- GCB: Who is responsible for maintenance of highway ditches?
- SM-L: It is the landowner's responsibility to maintain the ditch. We work with the CDC to make sure they are cleaned out. The advice and knowledge is here.
- Responsible for open ditch on Station Road. We have done certain bits of clearance in there.

## Cotswold District Council

Claire Lock:

- You are hearing from lots of different agencies and it might sound disjointed but that is not the case. We have come together to speak to you about the issues that we are aware of and to hear from you.
- There is a lot going on behind the scenes and we have regular multi-agency meetings. We work together to move things forward. We are all involved in slightly different ways. We are aware of the problems you have suffered recently but the CDC is here to listen to what you have to say so that we can focus on the key issues, address them and move forward.

Cllr David Fowles:

- If you are sitting in a property that has been flooded, it doesn't matter whose responsibility it is, you just want it sorted.
- We recognise that all of you have a lot of local knowledge, sometimes more so than the agencies. Sometimes the community's suggestions are more successful and we will continue to communicate with you via the parish council and we will be working closely with Mike
- As you are all aware we make £100,000 available in addition to the money that is already available. The CDC does not want to have a problem in South Cerney again and we will do everything we can through the agencies to get it right. It may take some time but we are here to solve the problem.

#### Representative from Bromford Living

Anita Russell:

- As landlords we have responsibilities to properties and customers who were affected and we are also working with the local agencies to help. We are very committed to finding a solution.

#### Questions invited from Members of the Public

Sarah Smith

- Had a problem with sewage backing up.
- Found that we couldn't use water, flush toilets, shower, use the washing machine for well over a week.
- Then in December my family and I went away for ten days over Christmas. When we came back we found it was backed up again despite us not using it.
- This has happened before, luckily didn't come into my house but did go into my neighbour's house and our insurance premium was increased dramatically.
- Want to know why this keeps happening. When the water pours out outside the Chapel and Highways pumps it out our water level goes down.

Anthony Crawford, Thames Water:

- The network is connected.
- When ground water hits the network it affects facilities. Sewers are designed to be self-cleansing. They take the sewage away and unless you have an area where you have a number of heavy industries or misuse then sewers work – except when they fill with ground water.
- You often get an infiltration of silt which also causes back up.
- We have tried to keep them as free flowing as possible using tankers.

Robin Mosedale:

- Why don't you fix the problem?

GCB: I do want to come to your problem Robin but let's stick with Station Road for the moment and then we'll come back to the Limes.

Sarah:

- I did call Thames Water and they did come out, lifted out inspection vent on opposite side of road and said "it's moving slowly but there's nothing wrong with it" they didn't do anything about it.
- There's been a horrible smell of sewage on many days throughout the past year or so.

Mike Stewart: Robin's problem is very closely related to Sarah's problem.

Robin Mosedale – Limes:

- I am extremely angry with TW as many of the residents are.
- The responsibility of what I have got to say is firmly in your camp. I have lived here for 3 years and my house is 11 years old. I was very careful in gaining very detailed surveys to determine if there were any issue with this property.
- In November we had foul water backed up for 6 days. In December over Christmas we had foul water backed up for 24 days. We couldn't run a tap, discharge waste-water, flush toilets or wash clothes.
- I didn't know there were problems with the water network in the Limes. The Limes sewer has a head in-front of my house. It is a sump and has the lowest elevation in the network – why?
- Secondly, why have you allowed planning permission of 150 houses with a connection with that sewer and my faulty sump? Do I sell the house? And at what cost Sir?
- You do not take credence from your customers, you abuse and ignore them.

AC, Thames Water: I really apologise (RM: Enough, you've done nothing)

GCB – Robin, I understand that this is very distressing but the agencies are here to help let's keep it on an even keel.

AC:

- The network does not naturally cope with a fully laden pipe. It will not cope with excess materials such as silt.
- What we can do is do as much pumping and tinkering as we can. We are trying to fight nature.

RM: Having a negative gradient is not fighting nature, it is a fault.

GCB – There was a lot of money spent on the sewer here a long time ago, have you done any investigations since these incidences?

AC:

- What we need to do is produce an infiltration plan to prevent ground water getting into the network.
- We will never have a completely sealed network but there are things we can do to try to prevent it.
- In terms of individual cases I will do my best to help your situation.

Mike Stewart:

- We had two new pipes; taking over from the old pipe that kept breaking.
- There was a new pumping station built and a new main built.
- We were told, it was implied, that the pumping station would be taking the effluent and all water from Broadway Lane, Holburn and the new development on the mallards.
- Why are we putting 150 new houses into a faulty sewage system rather than through the new pumping station, which we are paying for out of our water rates? Why are we not getting the best out of it?

AC: It is down to how the network is best configured to deal with the new houses.

MS:

- How can you say that when you know you have a six-inch pipe that is blocked and not laid correctly.
- I may not be an engineer but I know about the flow of water and about people's feelings in this village. For God's sake come down off your ivory tower and come down to our level friend.
- I hope sir that these extra 150 houses and extra effluent, if that backfires, by God you're going to know it.

GCB: I want to get on to the subject of the 150 houses as it's obviously the subtext in the room. Was it connecting with that?

James Harris – SC Parish Council

- The TW representative will refer back to the report that was done to look into where the sewers for the new houses should be.
- The last sentence: "for operational reasons it is probably simplest to connect through the Limes".

AC:

My commitment is that I will look at what we have done here. Our systems are designed to be as efficient as possible for our new customers.

GCB: We are fortunate to have Phillipa here who is responsible for environment, planning and development services. Could you tell us how this problem arose in the planning process and what can be done to make sure there aren't serious problems?

Phillipa Lowe:

- From a planning point of view consultations go out to the EA and TW and the decision is made on the basis of those consultations. We manage applications and carry out consultations.
- We had a condition about the requirements of the sewage system and were assured that the system would cope.

RM: What is your obligation when you know you have been misled?

PL:

- We are not aware that we are being misled.
- From a planning authority point of view we make our decisions based on what we are told.

RM – From the experience you have and the history of the sewers in this village it is incomprehensible that this is the case.

PL:

- We are not the drainage authority and only manage the planning application process.
- If we have a consultation that sets out the conditions, even if this council was to refuse us application the planning inspector would approve it and say that the developer must come up with a solution.
- The question needs to be, as you are putting it today, how will that be dealt with in terms of the network?

RM: I will ask you the question once more. What is your responsibility when you have been clearly misled.

PL: My responsibility is with the local planning authority.

GCB – I have stood with Robin inside and outside his house and there is clearly a serious problem here. I would now like to take this problem offline and ask TW and CDC to get to the bottom of this problem.

AC – We often find that those at the head of the run have a problem and my personal commitment to you is that I will get to the bottom of it and get it fixed for you, and the same to Mr Harris. Our evidence is that the network can cope.

Mrs Bennett: What is the evidence that it can cope?

AC: When we're consulted as part of the planning process we do model our networks. We do theoretical modelling...

Mrs Bennett: what is known is that it can't cope. My neighbour sitting next to me has in the past few years...

GCB – I am charging TW and CDC with great urgency, to come back to the Parish Council and tell them what their analysis has shown and what they can do about it. And whether the correct place has been connected or whether it should be connected to the new pipe that Mike and I and many others spent a great deal of trouble persuading TW that it needed doing.

AC – We will come back in two weeks.

GCB: We have that in the minutes.

Juliette Leyton: The Mallards has already been connected to the Limes.

AC – We will have our engineers working on this next week.

Member of the public: is there anyone from RedRow here as surely they must be worried about it?

GCB: There isn't a representative from RedRow here. Phillipa and Anthony will be able to get hold of RedRow next week.

Juliette Leyton:

- What assurances will we have about the impact of the Mallards. Phillipa said what I was going to say about planning.
- We had this coming up in the planning meetings over and over again. Telling us we had phenomenal rain over November and December doesn't change that we regularly experience flooding and yet you still think it's fine to put an extra 150 houses on a problem area.

GCB – We will come back to the new development

RM – the issue with the Limes has been known for 11 years, the back filling of foul water has occurred regularly and is nothing to do with ground water seepage, it is a design problem.

David Dunn– to TW.

- I have lived here for 50 years, the village has grown to a massive size.
- In the early 1970's we had a river way built.
- Has the network changed since 1970 to deal with the higher capacity. Has the network been upgraded?

AC – Not apart from the new pipe.

Doris Land:

- 13 years ago I had sewage in my house and we are hearing the same arguments over and over again.
- We get promises that things will be looked at and that things will be done, I think TW should be beheaded but that's my opinion.
- It doesn't matter that you can't live in your house, it doesn't worry Thames Water but they expect you to pay your bills.
- I want assurances from everyone that something will be done. How would you lot have liked your Christmas' spoilt like those living in Boxbush?
- Have some common human decency, TW you were the worst, Bromford you didn't do much better. This community needs help, get your finger out and help us.

AC:

The commitment I have made is that we will look at what is not happening with this network in this village. It has been exceptional but this doesn't change the impact this is ... the commitment we are making is for all of us to work together and get this end solution.

RM:

Awfully sorry to interrupt – you know the geology of this area is shale, you know the water table, everything is known – design to it.

GCB: I came to Boxbush when it happened before Christmas, you have my huge sympathy. You have commitments from Anthony, he will be back here in six months time.

Pam Smith – Cerney Wick

- Surely if the river was better controlled we wouldn't have this flooding? Years ago we had river men that cleared and dredged it.
- Surely if you made sure the churn was getting away a bit quicker you wouldn't have so much ground water

Ian Tomes, EA:

- When you've had a tremendous amount of rain most of the weirs and structures are open before they are full.
- These are issues we often have to address. If it continues to rain there is nothing we can do to control the water as the weirs have already been fully open beforehand.
- We have permissive powers to do some work and a limited budget to use. When we can identify the landowner we can ask him to clear it.

GCB: Can I suggest you speak to Ian after the meeting to identify the piece of land?

I went inside Geoffrey Reeds house in Boxbush and was then taken to the slip way. I would like to deal with the slip-way during this meeting

Shaun Parsons:

- Thanks to the parish council emergency action was taken and we are very grateful. Since then work has to be undertaken on the bridge further down. What was initially a temporary solution was put in, started off with four pipes. We got permission for this as an interim solution. Not final because the modelling needs to take place. What you now see will be staying in place after the work on the bridge has been completed.
- Maintenance: we know there are two places that are very built up. The river comes into Boxbush at right angles, major maintenance problems. We have heard today that the EA are not responsible for maintenance.

GCB: I saw the build-ups, who actually is responsible for these build-ups of silt?

IT: The landowner is responsible for clearing the build up.

GCB: Who does actually own it? It goes through the centre of the village.

We should look at the land registry.

MS: Unless the land has changed hands in the last fifty years you won't find it.

GCB: Can I ask you to establish who is going to do the maintenance?

James – Parish Council

- Had a meeting with Conservation officer – rather than your man up there talking to Parish Council he needs to talk to the conservation department of his own organisation as they said it should stay there.
- Because it is helping to buffer the health of the water than goes through the gates. The thinking was that the build up of gravel would help buffer this property.
- What happens along that bank where those properties are on Boxbush, Bromford had problems and put in a temp solution.
- The representative on Tuesday said that if the bank was built up it would compromise the flood plain.

GCB: Ian, we need you to take charge of this, see if sandbags are effective, if the silt should or should not be cleared.

James – could some of the house-holders be assured that something can be put in place along the bank?

GCB : After the sewage this is the most important problem we are dealing with today. Can we have your commitment to see what work can be done on this area?

IT:

- I want to look at a number of different approaches for reducing flood risk in South Cerney.
- I am not going to make a specific yes / no answer at a public meeting about that particular proposal but I am happy to look at this area alongside many other approaches we may adopt. We will look at whatever we think will help.
- I committed that we would revisit the Churn strategy and see what we can do.

GCB – This particular problem is really serious as these are elderly residents in homes owned by Bromford.

Jenny Phelps:

Landowners have been fantastic in working with the EA over the last few years. There is an NFU group who would like to be more involved. I'm sure we need to embrace it as they would like to be involved.

Steven Ridgely:

- Not only is the river Churn not that clear, we also have a canal behind us which was over-flowing.

- From the canal there was an overflow mini-river but after 100 yards or so it is over grown with trees growing in it and the flow is restricted. If the canal had more of an outflow some of these problems would be avoided.

GCB: Please can you, Sarah and Ian get together after this meeting to discuss that particular problem?

Resident of Lower Mill:

- The river goes right through the middle of my house. 40 years ago we had three or four hours before we had to get sluices out after every rainfall and we now get about thirty minutes.
- Cirencester has grown and we get a very quick run off. When you are computer modelling are you feeding in the growth of Cirencester? The floods in the village will get worse as Cirencester gets bigger.
- Lots of things went wrong but some went right. In the last 10 years, there were 3 pipes across the river, which used to restrict the flow, used to flood School Lane etc, tried for 10 years to get the pipes removed. A year ago we got rid of the pipes. Had those pipes still been there, there would have been many more houses flooded.
- I would like to thank the parish council and yourself for this.

Valerie Robinson:

There is still a bridge across at hideaway that blocks the river.

GCB – Ian, please include bridge and modelling.

CS:

- Thank you for recognising some of the work we have done.
- When we update our models we take the information for that catchment at the present time. If there has been development it will look at the current area.
- Part of our role in feeding into the planning system is ensuring that new developments manage their surface water correctly.

Donald Mattick :

Been in property twelve years.

When we first moved in, a particular stretch of the road's sewers were blocked. It has done it several times over the last twelve years even in mid-summer.

Wilst and Glos Standard quote "water board engineers have been out to South Cerney to begin enquiries. Thames Water officers visited and spoke to residents and discovered a drain blockage which they have pledged to fix" we have been told that cameras would be sent down the pipes but nothing has been done.

AC:

Blockages are a localised issue and can happen at any time. Come and immediately take the blockage away, put the camera down to see if there is a structural problem. If this hasn't happened then I will ensure it does.

Alan Fisher – Robert Franklin Way:

- This year has been the worst flooding we have ever had.

- Is it possible for the Hyperian owners to meet up with the EA to discuss our points?
- There has been a lot of work going on in the background with multi-agency meetings, are these minutes accessible?

GCB – I will capture the actions and send them electronically with these minutes.

Claire Jeffries – Silver Street:

- We flood awfully each time. Farm buildings submerged.
- Started to work with Jenny.
- Keen to say that we have land and we get flooded to a certain point. But lets work with the EA to see if we can flood some of the land to ease the impact on the village.

Juliette:

- Went to meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> Jan. There were a lot of the Cirencester Town Council there, however the Parish Councils hadn't been invited.
- We were told that we wouldn't be involved in any other multi-agency meetings. The line of communication was virtually impossible over a holiday let alone on Christmas day. Nobody answered the phone.
- TW – point of action, did you send letters of apology to those who were affected by the flooding and sewage?

AC: We have been very poor with our communication throughout this period, God forbid this ever happens again we have learnt an awful lot around our communications.

Clive:

Everybody seemed to be aware that it was going to be bad except Thames Water. Everybody who tried to get through just got hold music. Please set up a dedicated line.

AC:

We were inundated and didn't hit every call. There is a dedicated line for local authorities to call.

Close

No more comments.

GCB:

I have heard the worries today and think we should have a meeting sooner than six months, shortly after the elections in May, the beginning of June.

GCB & Parish Council to coordinate.

Apologies for not getting everyone in but we have given the agencies here a good flavour of how you're feeling. We are all working very hard and will ensure that

the agencies will work hard on your behalf to make sure this doesn't happen again.

The next meeting will take place on Friday 18 October from 0930-1100 at South Cerney Village Hall.