

South Cerney Flood meeting

South Cerney Village Hall

18th October 2013

Attendees:

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown – MP (GC-B)
Cllr David Fowles - Portfolio Holder for the Environment, Cotswold District council (DF)
Cllr Shaun Parsons – County Councillor for South Cotswolds (SP)
Cllr Juliet Layton, Cotswold District Council (JL)
Anthony Crawford – Head of Waste Water Networks, Thames Water (AC)
Chris Savage – Flood risk Management Team Leader, Environment Agency (CS)
Mike Stuart– Chairman of South Cerney Parish Council (MS)
Jim Parsons, Cotswold District Council, Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JM)
Laurence King – Flood Defence Engineer, Cotswold District Council (LK)
Scott Macaulay-Lowe – Local Highways Manager, Gloucestershire Highways (SM-L)
David Graham – Flood Risk Management Team, Gloucestershire County Council (DG)
Claire Lock – Head of Environmental Services, Cotswold District Council (CL)
Phillipa Lowe – Head of Planning, Cotswold District council (PL)
Ralph Young – Director, Cotswold District Council (RY)
Anita Phillips (Bromford) (AP)

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. Representative from Bromford Living
10. Questions from Members of the Public

1. Welcome

Good morning ladies and gentleman. I am Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, your member of parliament. There is a lot to get through this morning. Our representatives will be giving their reports and hopefully we will get some answer and allay your concerns. Mike Stuart, Chairman of your Parish Council is here – special thanks to you, Mike, for allowing us to use your village hall.

Mike Stuart

The essence of this meeting is that we need to get as much out of the EA, Thames Water and the other organisations to see what they have done since our meeting in March to discuss the flooding of 2012/2013. 10 months have gone by but so far we have made lots of requests, but I haven't seen very much progress. I hope Thames Water will tell us what they will be doing to improve things.

Anthony Crawford, Thames Water

The commitment we made last time was that we would investigate the problems. We agreed to carry out a number of studies and start to build up models and look at long and short term issues. We have put a number of flow monitors on the network – for example Station Road and The Limes. Those are specifically aimed at dealing with issues where we could have live problems – they are linked back to the control centres who can react straight away.

Also doing some wider area studies – CCTV work in Clarks Hay, School Lane, Boxbush Road, Station Road, Broadway Lane. Found some issues – some faults in sewers and infiltration, which we will go out to repair. Over the next couple of weeks several manholes will be sealed. If we get the same sort of issues this year that will prevent sewage coming out of the manholes – predominantly in School Lane and Silver Street.

The longer term issue is how this feeds into the Cotswold catchment plan. We are looking at a drainage plan for Cirencester and South Cerney. This will take us till Spring 2014 to complete. Need for Thames Water to get funding from our regulator in beginning of next year and our modelling and studies will help feed into that process.

Chris Savage, Environment Agency

Last time we talked about Churn Strategy and removing some of the service pipes and crossings. For us to be able to develop a business case for more work we need to look at flood risk. We have received a draft report and hoping to receive the final report in 4 weeks.

There were pipes through the railway embankment – enlarged after the last floods in December and January. We have looked to see if they increased flooding risk downstream, but they have reduced the upstream water levels without negatively affecting downstream.

Watercourse maintenance has taken place – operations team continues to work on this. There has been some gravel build up and we are monitoring this but don't see it as a flood risk. There has also been a build up in the mill stream, which we do think represents a risk and our plan is to remove that.

Condition of Fanshawe Weir. Last inspection was in July 2013 and we found that maintenance is required on the sill of the weir. The weir is in private ownership so this won't be classed as maintenance. If it deteriorates further we will contact the owner. Community preparedness. You can manage flood risk but unfortunately not remove it. We met with the Parish Council in September and discussed the production of a Community Flood Plan. A template has been sent to the Parish Council. One of the areas of concern was a lack of a number of the Incident Room – we have now provided a number so this should be a smoother process from now on

National flood forum – this is a Charity who specialises in speaking to communities who have suffered flooding.

Regional flood and coastal committee - gives assistance to community self help committees. Will work with them to help. No idea what this bit means!

David Graham – Gloucestershire County Council

I am part of the flood team at the GCC. Multi-agency meetings have been set up looking at all areas and assessing what each agency is doing. Report back to EA and DEFRA on a regular basis. 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 ASAP.

GCB -GCC will then have a much greater understanding of the issues – please don't be shy in saying what you think to the GCC.

Claire Lock – Head of Environmental Services - CDC

CDC has been working with the key agencies – Environmental Agency and Thames Water. Another key area we can help is with community resilience – how to respond in an emergency. We are keen for communities to produce their own Local plans. To have the resilience within the community is very helpful. When we had the floods in 2007 it became very apparent how useful community resilience is as in some cases other agencies cannot physically get to communities. There is help and support within the CDC and if there are any issues around planning my colleague Phillipa Lowe is here today and will be able to help.

GCB- can I now introduce Anita Russell from Bromford Living. Thank you Anita for coming.

Anita Russell – Bromford Living

A number of our properties were impacted at Christmas and we have been working with CDC with regard to long term solutions. We have also carried out remedial work to

some of the properties. Improvements have been made to our emergency contact procedures. Last year we were having requests for sandbags etc, and the suppliers were closed. We now have our own stores so are much better prepared for the future. A temporary sandbank has been built along the riverbank. This is a temporary measure and more work will be done to improve it. This is not on our land but we are working with CDC and will approach the appropriate people. If anyone would like to talk about any specific issues they should approach me afterwards.

Scott Macaulay- Lowe – Local Highways Manager, Gloucestershire Highways

Our asset is the road drains. Alongside our usual maintenance this year we have done our gully returns in South Cerney. Recent attention has focussed on Upper Up and we have had a recent meeting with members of the Parish Council and Lawrence King will give you an update on that. Aware that the flooding was causing issues there. This was a very productive meeting.

We have an area of land in South Cerney that we do not know what we are dealing with under the subsoil. Between myself and Laurence, and a very dutiful Parish Council – we have given out tasks. Will be dealing with this through CDC and Laurence will be looking at utilities, land registry, etc. There has been some correspondence with the Parish Council with regard to the pre-investigation and I will speak to Mike Stuart at the end of the meeting. Very keen to prevent the road from flooding - particularly the Cirencester road and we are looking at the ditches. Where we know we have particular issues we will help. If there are issues with regard to any of our gullies do let us know on 08000 514 514. Parish Council are very proactive –would like to see this from our other Parish Councils.

GC-B - Pat on the back for the entire team, Mike.

We need to know how planning impacts – how does the system work? Where we are with planning applications? Can I now introduce you to Phillipa Lowe.

Phillipa Lowe – Head of Planning, Cotswold District Council

The Mallards – we have had reassurance from Thames Water and the EA that the system could cope. I currently have no more updates on that planning application. Consultation on the local planning process, covering the next 20 years, is happening now. Also the Infrastructure delivery plan, which asks “if we are looking at planning, what infrastructure do you need?” All the Agencies are consulted on that document. Long term planning is a multi-agency approach. Please look out for the consultation document and give us your views.

GC-B –I imagine that the best approach would be for you to have parish open meetings – maybe get the Planning people along.

Shaun Parsons – County Councillor for South Cotswolds

I will be very brief. We are 10 months on now and we are still at the planning stage. Things simply haven't happened. People are still very concerned. If we have another winter like last winter what will happen. Certain things that were promised from Thames Water didn't arrive. Those issues need to be addressed.

Fundamental problem is that we have a very high water table, all the time and when the sewage system backs up it backs up very quickly. A number of the culverts haven't been looked at.

There is also a major problem in Siddington, however that will be raised in Cirencester. 74 homes had sewage backing up into their homes. Thames Water says it is an external problem.

Chris Savage – the problem is the volume of ground water – very little you can do about it when you get a lot of ground water in the system. From July last year to February rain was exceptionally high – this year the levels are 4 grades lower than last year. We have improved our response and have provided the Parish Council with numbers that go straight through to the incident room. If no incident room available then we have someone on call 24 hours a day.

Also carried out routine maintenance. Very important to develop community flood plan with the Parish Council. If there is anything needed to support that flood plan, please contact us.

Mike Stuart – can Thames Water follow suit please? At Christmas Juliet Layton CDC tried for hours to get through to their incident room. If Thames Water had a number restricted to 3 or 4 people in each community it would be very helpful.

GC-B – Anthony - can you address that?

AC – we normally ask everyone to go through our 24 hour line. However, this is something we should consider. You have a commitment that I will look at the issue of getting a number.

GC-B – can we have an assurance from you that we will have a specific number within the next month? One of the main complaints was that people couldn't get through to Thames Water.

AC – what will be different this winter? We have done a lot of work with our contractors – the biggest difficulty this year was our contractual response and how quickly we dealt with flooding. We have done a lot to strengthen our contracts. Improved response time and new tanker contracts. Our response has improved considerably from last year. One of the tactical solutions we will be putting in this year

is manhole sealing, where we have identified problems we will be doing that this year. The whole catchment solution, however, will be dependent on the modelling study.

DF – not a case of if we will flood but when. We have all worked in a number of different parishes going back to 2007. We must look at community resilience. It's not just this community who will be trying to get through to the number it's the whole of the Cotswolds and the whole of the country. Need to know what is going to happen this winter.

MS –it's not just flooding in the usual sense, we are more concerned about the high level of the ground water backing up in the drains. People are days without toilet facilities, etc.

Robin Mosedale – The Limes. My household was severely affected for 26 days. Have been involved in all the meetings. Concerning the sewer – this is obfuscation. We know about the high water table. You don't need modelling to tell you what the problem is. The whole system is failing. Have followed it through due process, taken it to the Consumer Council for Water before I go to OFWAT. Need to look at the adequacy of the sewer system for this village. There are a lot of agencies involved unnecessarily. I moved here 4 years ago and had a thorough search.

My questions are threefold: 1) Thames Water – the foul sewer is not functioning without often and frequent failures. We have a shale geology. What is causing the failure and what are your plans? 11 months after the first issue in November and I have no proposed solution. 2) I have listened to an awful lot about contingencies. My issue is that my drains are below road level. Pumps arrived in The Limes, but it is not sufficient to just pump out The Limes. 3) Why are we in this situation? South Cerney is being marketed as a satellite town. Are you assured that more development will not exacerbate the current situation?

AC – 1) I will try to put it into context. Some of the flooding was caused by high water. We are trying to enhance the infrastructure. We have a network that has a particularly difficult geographical strata that causes water to back up in the sewers.

RM – I am only interested in your service to me as a customer.

AC – The long term solution has not been finalised yet. We need to talk to the regulator for funding.

RM- I am not happy with your response. You are not meeting your obligations. Question 2) contingencies . We tried to get through to the emergency line. Couldn't use the services for 5 days.

SP – Robert Franklin Way pumping station had excessive capacity – the pump could have taken more.

Peter Jay (Parish Councillor) – our house has an open drain where the kitchen waste comes through. We do not have 2 systems. When we were wading through water on Christmas Eve – we had to bypass the nearest road drain because it was completely blocked. Without the bowls club pump, houses would have been under water.

GC-B – what will Thames Water do about it when Robin Moseley's house is flooded with sewerage?

AC – I think our emergency response is to tanker away if we have to.

RM – the tankers refused to pump any water away because it would have backed up into The Limes. When they came they did nothing. Could you please think of your contingency again and report back.

GC-B – I am concerned that we are 10 months on from the last meeting. I don't see that any action has happened. I said in a speech in the House of Commons that the performance of Thames Water is woeful. You must report back to your Chairman that we are fed up in this constituency. Will you please take this back? We are no further forward than we were. People are still getting their houses sewer flooded.

AC – we are currently modelling. We have undertaken to carry out maintenance on our network where we can do it ahead of this winter, but in terms of a long term solution, we have said we will need to understand the network in its entirety and must go through the funding issue with the regulator. That will take till Spring next year. We will deliver on that commitment. I cannot speed that process up. I am sorry that it is taking this time.

GC-B – the perception is that you are a London based company and you are not giving us our just deserts. You can tell your Chairman that.

Clive Bennett – I have seen correspondence from Thames Water saying that their system works perfectly except when it rains. On the subject of Flow meters – what are you going to do when it triggers an alarm? When they go off, what are you going to do? What can they do if your system does not work?

AC – our network is capable of coping with the drainage in the system around the area. However, cannot deal with infiltration or river water getting into the sewers. Need to try to deal with that issue. Where we find holes we will seal them. If we get a scenario where we see rivers rising it gives us an opportunity to tank sewage away from those areas.

RM – need a pro-active prevention plan.

Cllr Juliet Layton CDC – when we met Thames Water at Robin's house – they assured us that the pipes were working properly. Isn't there another system we can use? Are we not using the wrong product for the job? You say you are going to repair the joints. Could they not be replaced?

GC-B – is there not a sleeve you can put in the pipes to make the pipes less porous?

AC – sewers are not designed to be 100% water tight – it is the nature of the design. There are things you can do – we have a relining programme. Where we find sewers with particularly high infiltration we will reline. We are trying to determine whether the solution for South Cerney is to reline.

RM – did you not have sufficient understanding when you agreed The Mallards?

PL – The Mallards – they had no objection – thought that the drainage could cope. In terms of the impact – the network can cope. The development itself is not the problem. The historical problem is a separate issue.

Doris Land – parish councillor. In 2000 a gentleman came to dig holes in my sitting room – found out it was blue clay. When wet it turns to water itself. Nothing has been done. If the problem is in the village to start with, you should gauge that into the planning. It is 13 years since I started getting the MPs involved. We are still having these problems with Thames Water. There are an awful lot of people who are very worried about Christmas. Let's get something sorted out.

Chris Jeffery – if as an outcome of your modelling there needs to be work done and if the results are not known until next spring. What happens if you miss the cut off date for funding – can you assure us that the date will not be missed?

AC – We have already sought funding – it is a single application not a separate one for this village. Once we receive the funding we will need to determine priorities.

GC-B – just to be clear – when you say that we plan to invest £50,000. If your modelling shows that there needs to be work done you will be able to invest that money?

AC - subject to our regulator approving the funding.

Chris Jeffery – how do you know if this will be sufficient?

AC – we know that this area is an issue. Our modelling supports the application to the regulator. Also questionnaires are sent round to the local area. We do want to resolve the problems.

GC-B– you knew 10 months ago. Why have you delayed it? Why will it not be ready till spring?

AC– the modelling work has been going on throughout the summer period. It is a long process.

Ian Roberts – I thought it was supposed to be flood prevention not mopping up afterwards. Could something be done about the Churn? All the water comes off the hills into the Churn. I have been in the village for 30 years and the river can rise up to 18" after only a moderate storm further up the valley.

CS – Doesn't matter how big the channel is. Flood prevention isn't possible entirely – you can manage the risks with community preparedness and response. Need to have a good flood plan. National Flood Forum – have experience of working with communities. Would like to follow up with Anita.

Amanda Coates - Not clear to me that the EA have done anything to help. We live alongside the river - the wall that is alongside Bromford's bungalows – we have asked if that wall can be permanent. What has been done?

CS – By removing the surface pipes it slows down the water so you have lower levels. Regarding moving the wall - meeting with Bromford to see how this can be made into a permanent structure.

James Harris – Parish Council – I have heard that you will not be digging out by the Fanshawe Mill. If more water was sent down the channel that would cause the water to be deflected by Lower Churn. By digging out some of the gravel, and putting some of the boards back to get the flow increased on the south side, it would divert so many problems away from so many homes.

CS – one gravel shoal needs to be removed. They have looked at the shoal from the weir. I think the best way would be for one of our operational colleagues to meet with the Parish Council. They can meet and programme the work.

GC-B – can you take this back please?

Valerie Robinson – you have only got to walk over the bridge and look at the millstream – it is full up with weed and rubbish. Who is responsible for clearing this? Need to keep the channel clear so there is a proper flow. The concrete bridge causes a back up. Mr Mould clears his at lower mill.

CS – it is the owner's responsibility to keep it clear – whoever owns the bank. We undertake a single run through during the year – vegetation and rubbish removal. We are restricted on how much we can do. Have worked with other communities – self-help groups will go through and do a second run through.

GC-B – can I encourage you to work with the Parish Council?

Jennifer Grindle – live at Box Bush, 15 ft from the river. We need the barrier. We have a storm drain near us. We do need the barrier built. The river is full of gravel and rubbish.

GC-B – we do need this to be done.

Peter Jay - Parish Council. Could you, Chris, comment on Ian Robert's comment that the river rises 18". The river levels seem to change daily. Is it because of the water catchment areas upstream? What about the 600 houses in Cirencester?

CS – we have monitoring information. The rate of rise is not the overall problem – it is the level it gets to. There have been increased levels of rivers generally – unsure whether that is climate change or planning.

Alan Fisher – has lived in Robert Franklin Way for 36 years. I have been unaware that the EA has checked the levels outside my house. At the last meeting there was a lady representing the farmers. They said they would deal with the ditches.

Chris Rumble - We have now mapped every water course through the area.

GC-B – have we rounded up all the points?

Paul Smith – you said you were going to seal the manhole covers. What happens to the water?

AC – that means that it displaces it elsewhere.

Juliet Layton – when it rained the other day it flooded at the top of Broadway Lane

GC-B – can you take it up with Scott Macauley-Lowe?

Mr Mould – the level of the water has been rising each year. What is the long term plan for the next 40 years?

CS – 2 aspects – future development. Churn strategy – would be supplying further flood storage.

SP – my understanding is that we have to help to get this through to OFWAT. Questionnaires should be reissued – everyone needs to fill them in.

AC – 60 questionnaires were issued. 15 replies. They were issued to the houses identified. We will reissue.

GC-B – can we do it through the Parish Council?

MS – we issued our own form of questionnaire to the people who were most badly affected. We told Thames Water that we were doing that. 9 months later Thames Water said that we were using the wrong format so information cannot be used as unacceptable to OFWAT. It's another 10 months on. Are we prepared to go through the process again?

GC-B – I want to hear when. Can it be done through Mike?

GC-B - Another meeting will be fixed for March 2014. I urge Thames Water and the Environment Agency to come to that meeting with positive actions. I hope we have achieved something.

Subsequent to the meeting, it has now been decided that the Date of the Next Meeting will be on Friday 4 April 2014 from 0930-1100 am.