

**MINUTES of a Public Meeting to consider Flooding issues in Shaw & Whitley held on Monday 6<sup>th</sup> October 2014 at Shaw School Hall, Shaw at 7.00pm**

**Present:** Melksham Without Parish Council (MWPC) Cllr Richard Wood (Chair), Cllr Terry Chivers, Cllr Jan Chivers, Cllr Ian Tait, Cllr Alan Baines, Cllr Greg Coombes, Cllr Rolf Brindle, Cllr Paul Carter

Danny Everett – Wiltshire Council Principle Drainage Engineer.

Renate Malton – Wiltshire Council Community Resilience (Flood) Team

Cllr Simon Jacobs – Chairman North Wiltshire Operational Flood Working Group.

180 local residents signed the attendance book.

- Introduction and Housekeeping:** The Meeting Chairman , MWPC Cllr Wood welcomed the local residents, identified the fire escapes and introduced the Melksham Without Parish Councillors, Wiltshire Councillor Simon Jacobs, Danny Everett (Principle Drainage Engineer) and Renate Moulton (Community Resilience). The Chairman explained that this meeting had been called to react to the unprecedented flooding of recent weeks, some properties that had flooded this time had never flooded before, and that the public would be able to ask questions and put forward their points of view after hearing from Mr. Everett and Ms. Malton.
- Danny Everett – Wiltshire Council Principle Drainage Engineer:**  
Mr. Everett explained that as Wiltshire Council’s Principle Drainage Engineer his role was to go out to areas of the County after flooding has occurred to identify where flooding has happened and the causes, identifying and assessing problem areas and trying to find resolutions. For rectifying work to be carried out Mr. Everett needed to be able to recognise where the flow paths and receptors were. Mr. Everett explained that “water does not recognise boundaries” and that he needed to look at the area holistically as any works carried out in Shaw and Whitley could then affect areas further down stream such as Dunch Lane and Shurnhold. Any drainage works carried out needed to be looked at as a river catchment area, and as such Shaw, Whitley, Dunch Lane and Shurnhold fall under the North Wilts river catchment.  
Mr. Everett reported that Wiltshire Council had engaged the services of a company, Atkins, to create a predictive model of water flow from the rain hitting the ground and its journey through culverts, drains, ditches and streams to the River Avon. He explained that in order to do this he needed as much information from residents as possible, both what happens currently and any historical information about where old ditches, culverts and attenuation ponds used to be. Additionally there could be overgrown drains and drains in private gardens that he was unaware of. He reported that this exercise had recently been carried out for the area of Dauntsey and the model generated from the data given was actually 1m out from what physically occurred, therefore being able to gather as much information as possible about the flooding in Shaw, Whitley, Shurnhold and Dunch Lane would ensure that the model for this area could be more accurately calibrated. It is important that the data gathered contains information such as depth, direction of flow and velocity of flooding.  
Mr. Everett stated that the Environment Agency statistics for the weather occurrence on the 18<sup>th</sup> September was that it was a 1 in 155 year return period and that there was between 60 to 70mm of rain within a 3 hour period with some areas having 60mm of rain

in less than an hour. Highway drainage systems were designed for a return period of 1 in 30 to 1 in 40. This was exceptional rainfall; however these exceptional circumstances were occurring more often. He re-iterated that in order to calibrate the model and make it a more effective tool that he needed quality information and appealed to residents to be candid in their information about whether their homes and gardens were flooded and the depth of any flood water. He reassured the residents that any information given will be for the use of Atkins to create this model and will not be shared with insurance companies. Atkins would work out where the water comes from and goes to and will make recommendations. Mr. Everett stated that he was not able to make promises about any works that could be carried out by Wiltshire Council as until any recommendations are made he doesn't know the cost implication. He explained that his role does not include any maintenance service of drains and gulleys and that any maintenance issues would be passed to the relevant teams at Wiltshire Council. The information gathered would help to identify whether drainage maintenance regimes need to be reviewed.

3. **Cllr Simon Jacobs - Chairman North Wiltshire Operational Flood Working Group:**

Cllr Jacobs stated that he appreciated the difficulties that residents had experienced and that this meeting was being held to listen to parishioners in order to try to mitigate the situation. He explained that new by-laws had been passed to empower Wiltshire Council to ensure that landowners keep ditches and culverts on their land clear to prevent flooding. He emphasised that this applied to not just major landowners and farmers but also to private households that may have ditches at the end of their gardens. If landowners do not keep ditches clear then ultimately Wiltshire Council now have the power to charge the landowner should Wiltshire Council have to undertake this work. He stated that Ms. Malton had produced an information pack with regard to flood prevention and ditch clearance.

4. **Environment Agency Responsibility:**

A resident asked what responsibility the Environment Agency had. Mr. Everett replied that the Environment Agency only dealt with main rivers and that Wiltshire Council was responsible for all other watercourses. He reported that the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 puts a duty on Wiltshire Council under Section 19 to undertake Flood Investigations and Mr. Everett currently has 6 ongoing investigations, stating that on the 18<sup>th</sup> September the rainfall was such that the systems in place just simply could not cope. He clarified that the information he required was where the flow of water came from, the path it took and where it ended up, adding that photographs were extremely useful especially for judging the depth of water. He explained that there was a GPS device that residents could borrow in order that they could more accurately map locations with X & Y co-ordinates. A resident volunteered to use this device when out walking to identify the exact location of some of the ditches.

5. **Renate Malton – Wiltshire Council Community Resilience (Flood) Team**

Ms. Malton stated that she worked with the drainage team and was currently working with Melksham Without Parish Council to develop a Flood Plan but in order to do that the Parish Council needed Flood Wardens. She explained that Flood Wardens were volunteers from the community, that this was not a particularly strenuous task, more one of keeping an eye on local water courses and informing the parish council of problems and issues that could lead to flooding, such as blocked drains, ditches, etc. The Flood

Wardens would also be given training on flood prevention and resilience and how people could protect their properties and make individual flood plans in order that this information could be passed on within the community. During a flood, Flood Wardens would document events and liaise with Wiltshire Council and agencies such as Wiltshire Fire and Rescue, especially in identifying the more vulnerable members of the community. The role is one of “Warning and Informing” not putting oneself in danger or actively tackling flooding water – that was for the emergency services.

Ms. Malton explained about P.E.A.S. – Parish Emergency Assistance Scheme. Wiltshire Council was giving a small supply of equipment to parishes to help them in the first instance with any flooding incidents. Within the parish of Melksham Without 3 locations have been identified for a supply of sandbags, gel sacks, fluorescent flood warden tabards and road signs in order that when flooding strikes there will be provisions closely available.

A resident reported that he and others were very cynical about support from Wiltshire Council due to a previous lack of help and availability of sandbags, in particular over Christmas Eve 2013 with one resident being told to buy his own sandbags. Ms. Malton replied that Wiltshire Council did have a protocol with regard to the distribution of sandbags and that unfortunately when flooding situations occur it is usually over widespread areas of Wiltshire and they are unable to get out to all 185 parishes. Additionally the speed with which flood water rises also means that sandbags cannot be distributed to residents quickly enough. The P.E.A.S scheme is being developed to try to alleviate some of these problems. Ms. Malton also explained that rather than wait for Wiltshire Council to react, that individual households should have their own flood plan which was something that she could assist residents to devise.

## 6. **Public Participation:**

Residents gave their views and asked questions. The issues and questions raised were:

- i) Can the Flood Grant be extended?
- ii) Lack of availability of sandbags and support from Wiltshire Council.
- iii) Deeper, wider drains are needed.
- iv) Ditches need to be cleaned/cleared out.
- v) Storm drains need to be cleaned/cleared out as currently many are full of debris and silt and the flooding occurred as water simply could not drain into them.
- vi) This year there was a mud slide; there was still residual mud on the road and this needs to be cleared up and taken away or it will be washed into the drains blocking them up.
- vii) Historical ditches and attenuation ponds were no longer in place and need to be reinstated.
- viii) At the top of Hill the quarry is now working and they have installed a large culvert. Where is this water going?
- ix) The hedgerows have all been removed from the fields on this hill which means that there is nothing to prevent large quantities of mud from flowing down the hill into top lane.
- x) Dunch Lane is a designated flood plain and needs a bund to keep the water in. Also there are now too many trees growing in the ditches preventing the flow of water.

- xi) When the old school site in Shurnhold is built on the drainage issues will be exacerbated. It was queried why Wiltshire Council would give planning for such a development on a flood plain?
- xii) The model produced by Atkins will be ineffective if routine cleaning and maintenance of drainage systems are not carried out – the most up to date highways drainage schedule on Wiltshire Council’s website was 2007. There should be a policy re drainage cleaning with areas susceptible to flooding being cleaned more often
- xiii) There were concerns over the amount of times that Shaw Primary School has been forced to close due to flooding and the knock on effect that this has to the children’s’ education.
- xiv) Lack of information with regard to self help.

Danny Everett apologised on behalf of his colleagues at Wiltshire Council with regard to lack of sandbags and the poor response that some residents received. Although drainage maintenance was not Mr. Everett’s department he assured residents that he would report back and pass on this information to the relevant department. He reported that the aim was to clear gulleys once a year and although there was no legal requirement for Wiltshire Council to clear drains on the highway this should be done. He stated that Shaw Primary School was a high priority as classed as critical infrastructure, but reiterated that any works done to prevent flooding here would affect the residents in Shurnhold, he therefore had to look at the area holistically once Atkins had produced the model. He further reiterated Cllr Jacobs earlier statement that the cleaning of ditches was the responsibility of landowners. He explained that the Central Government Repair & Renew Grant was for those properties that were flooded for the two days over Christmas 2013 only and could not be extended. To put this most recent flood into context he reported that over 700 properties in Wiltshire were flooded, 25 in Corsham when the last time this area flooded was in 1934.

Cllr Jacobs thanked residents for coming and asked them to take advantage of this opportunity to give as much information as possible in order that some of the issues could be resolved.

The Chairman asked residents to consider signing up as flood wardens, and asked them to mark up the maps which would be available in the Parish Council Offices, open Tuesdays and Thursdays 9.30 – 2.30, Shaw Church and Shaw Village Hall. He asked residents to send any photos to the e-mail set up by the Parish Council, [flood@melkshamwithout.co.uk](mailto:flood@melkshamwithout.co.uk) and to look out for information on the Parish Council website.

Meeting closed at 9.00pm

Chairman, 8<sup>th</sup> December 2014

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