

**MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY PARISH MEETING
OF THE PARISH of WRAYSBURY**
held in Wraysbury Primary School at 7.30 pm on
Wednesday 12th MARCH 2014

1. PRESENT

Councillor A Davies, Chairman of the Parish Council, in the Chair

Councillor J Lenton, Parish Councillor (Wraysbury) and Ward Councillor.
Councillor C Rayner, Parish Councillor (Horton) and Ward Councillor.

Mr D Perkins, Head of Streetcare and Operations, RBWM.

Mr C Dickens, Senior Technical Engineer, Thames Water.

Mr D Leamon, Head of Maintenance, Thames Water.

Ms H Murgatroyd, Capital Programme Communications Manager, Thames Water.

Mr H Davidson, South-east Director of Operations, Environment Agency.

Mr D Murphy, Area Flood and Coastal Risk Manager, Environment Agency.

Ms J Simpson, West Thames Area Manager, Environment Agency.

The Acting Clerk, the Deputy Clerk and approximately 180 registered electors of the Parish of Wraysbury.

2. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION BY THE CHAIRMAN

Councillor A Davies thanked everyone for their attendance and introduced those seated at the top table. He drew attention to the agenda and requested that all speakers be treated with the high level of respect which was customary in the Parish of Wraysbury. He expressed sympathy for all those affected by the flooding and expressed gratitude to all those who demonstrated the tremendous Wraysbury spirit. He paid particular tribute to Dave Francis and his team, and the volunteers who set up the reception centre within the school.

3. DAVE FRANCIS, FLOOD WARDEN

The Flood Warden explained that he had been the focus of many of the expressions of gratitude, but he wished to place on record his thanks to all the wardens and numerous other volunteers who all contributed to the success of the operations. He praised the spirit of the Wraysbury community as a whole. He thanked Mr Perkins at RBWM. He explained that he himself had not been flooded, but that he knew many people who had been flood victims, including his elderly mother. He emphasised the need to rebuild Wraysbury and look after its villagers.

4. THAMES WATER

Danny Leamon

The Head of Maintenance for Thames Water (TW) explained that he and his team had been

in Wraysbury during the floods, where he experienced the flooding first-hand. He expressed his sympathy to all those affected. He apologised for the level of customer services, which he explained had not been as good as it should have been. There had been complete inundation in places, and the sewage system was not designed to cope with it. Of 2,600 pumping stations in the TW area, over 900 had been impacted by flooding. Tens of thousands of customers had their service affected.

In response, TW had an event team in place 24 hours a day, seven days a week. One hundred tankers were operational (the fleet was normally 25 vehicles), 100,000 sand-bags had been installed. The clean-up operation had commenced. Individual properties were being visited to remove debris and open system blockages. Works were likely to continue for up to twelve months. Within this there would be attempts to build in additional flood resilience. The Wraysbury sewage system was unusual in that it was a vacuum system, rather than the traditional gravity system. It was not designed to operate under water. There was a need for the ground-water levels to drop to fully implement the repair programme. He acknowledged that there had been difficulties with the pumping stations at Friary Road and The Avenue.

A number of options would be implemented or explored to increase resilience:

- Build proper flood defences around the pumping stations.
- Some stations were built below ground. Could these be raised?
- Electrical supplies should be protected or raised above water level.
- New, more flood resilient vacuum heads were being trialled. If successful they could be rolled out.

TW recognised the need to restore and improve services where possible, but noted that they were dealing with system failures across the region.

5. ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

Howard Davidson

The South-east Director of Operations at the Environment Agency (EA) explained that he also had been in contact with many affected residents. He praised the efforts of the Wardens and other volunteers. He described the weather events which caused the floods as 'extraordinary', where the region had received the equivalent of over 80% of annual rainfall in less than a month. It was suggested that it was a one in two hundred and fifty year event, where river flows were more than double the flood of the events in 1894 and 1947, combined.

The EA's role was to:

- Keep an eye on the weather, and issue warnings as appropriate.
- Work in close co-operation with the Met Office and closely monitor the EA gauging stations.
- Operate all the structures, such as the Jubilee River channel.
- Provide advice and support to the emergency services and local authorities.
- Place ambassadors in the affected areas to assist residents and collect data.

He concluded by stating that there was a need to find short and long term solutions.

Julia Simpson

The West Thames Area Manager outlined the timetable of events and warnings issued by the EA. She explained that the EA had worked 24 hours a day seven days a week, in partnership with other agencies such as local authorities and the Army.

She explained that the Jubilee River (JR) channel had been operated a number of times since November 2013, to manage the flow of water. It had operated 25 times since November, contrasted with three operations in the previous decade. The EA used gates to control the flow within the JR. This was monitored by gauges, as well as spotters, to ensure the channel itself did not flood.

The JR water re-joined the Thames in a similar way to a backwater. The water was of no greater volume than if it had remained in the Thames itself. The JR was not used as a reservoir to hold water back.

In relation to dredging, the EA's view, based on evidence from the 2003 flood, was that the scouring effect from a major flood was more effective than an annual dredge. Subsequent surveys had backed this up. The centre third of the river continued to be dredged on an annual basis for navigation. It was agreed that the details of this planned dredging would be emailed to the Chairman of the Parish Council.

It was recognised that flooding could occur again in Wraysbury in the next ten to fifteen years, so there was a more urgent need to take action.

David Murphy

The Area Flood and Coastal Risk Manager explained that he had been present in Wraysbury during the flooding and spoke to many residents.

He explained that one of his roles was to lead on the development of the River Thames Scheme (RTS) for Datchet to Teddington. Consultation on the RTS took place in 2009. A number of options were considered, including bunds and diversion. Diversion was agreed as the preferred option. It was a major scheme, covering seven local authorities. The estimated cost for the full scheme, £256 million (to construct, plus a further £282 million for ancillary costs and maintenance), had yet to be approved. It had therefore been split into two phases.

The first phase, which had already been funded, covered the preparatory works, the environmental survey, planning applications and weir improvement plans. Construction projects were expected to start in 2016. This phase would be completed in 2018/19. Phase 2, if funded, would commence in 2019, and would be completed by 2025/26.

Other comments during the presentation included:

- There was a political awareness of how people felt and residents had vocalised this in recent weeks.

- Government changes to the flood prevention funding rules in 2010 had improved the chances of the scheme being built.
- The EA had engaged consultants to find other sources of funding, but it was hoped that funding would be forthcoming from central government, local government, and business contributions.
- Other sources could be the National Lottery and the EU. A total of 57 potential funding streams were being explored.
- The recent floods had emphasised the need to progress with the scheme. Benefits from Phase 1 would include enhanced property protection and better emergency planning (arising partly from lessons learned in 2014).
- The sheer volume of water in the Thames basin in early 2014 meant that flooding in Wraysbury was inevitable.
- There was a need for more households to engage in the property flood protection measures on offer.

He concluded his address by inviting members of the public to attend the control rooms to better understand the systems that were already in place. It was agreed that this should be co-ordinated via the Parish Council.

6. **ROYAL BOROUGH OF WINDSOR AND MAIDENHEAD**

Councillor Colin Rayner

Councillor Rayner explained that he had seen too much misery, and he did not want to see it again. He underlined the importance of convincing the Prime Minister to listen to the arguments and deliver the River Thames Scheme with immediate effect. He stated that the Borough did not know they could call upon the Army for assistance. If the Army had arrived sooner, more households could have been saved from the devastation of flooding. He highlighted the need for dredging the River Thames, the side rivers, and the many drains and ditches in Wraysbury.

David Perkins

The Head of Streetcare and Operations explained that many Council staff had worked very hard before, during and after the flooding. He recognised the misery that many residents had been put through and stated that it was a privilege to work with so many dedicated residents.

Other comments during the presentation included:

- An initial clean-up was about to be completed. This would then be followed by a programme of Highways repairs.
- Once this had been completed a more detailed clean would take place.
- On un-adopted roads it was possible that some basic repairs would take place.
- In relation to the Wraysbury Drain it was noted that the Borough had responsibility for its maintenance, under the 1799 Inclosure Act.
- Borough staff had done an initial survey of the Wraysbury Drain, but it was shortly due to be subjected to a very detailed (once a decade) survey. The survey would take a number of experts six to eight weeks to complete.

- It had already been noted that there was a lot of vegetation and detritus to be removed. There were also a number of trees that would require attention. Ownership and responsibility for ditches could be a complex matter. Many people would be considered riparian owners.
- It was estimated that there were over 700km of water courses in the Royal Borough.

Councillor John Lenton

The Parish and Borough Councillor stressed the need for more dredging. He refuted the suggestion that the River Thames self-scoured.

During the presentation, the following comments were made:

- He considered that more water could have been retained in Maidenhead.
- He disputed the fact that the Jubilee River had made no difference to Wraysbury because, a) the water that would otherwise have flooded in Maidenhead not only came to Wraysbury more quickly, adding to the water that was coming anyway, but also b) without the JR, some of the water would have been retained in the Maidenhead flood plain.
- The flood protection measures should have started at the bottom and worked upstream, rather than building the JR first. Now the remaining protection was likely to start downstream and work up, it would mean that Wraysbury would be the last to receive protection. The EA had confirmed that there was no technical reason why the project could not be built all at once, instead of in stages, and so be completed several years earlier.
- He contrasted the whole-life cost of the RTS (£538 million) with the cost of HS2 (at least £42 billion).
- A number of funding suggestions were made. These included a flood relief tax on developers who would benefit from the RTS. The tax would be used to service and repay finance for the project. The finance could take the form of a long term bond issued by Pension funds to finance the project. Pension Funds always sought safe investments with reasonable returns.
- There was a need to work together with downstream residents to present a strong case.
- Attention was drawn to the suggested actions arising from the Clive Onions report. Many of these had not been acted upon.
- He expressed a view that less attention should be given to ecological matters and more emphasis should be placed on the welfare of people.

7. PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

During the discussion the following comments were made:

- The presence of the JR channel meant that water was prevented from entering the Maidenhead flood plain. It therefore ended up in Wraysbury and beyond.
- The EA stated that insurance companies chose their own methods to assess flood risk and did this using their own flood maps. Flood Re was due to be introduced.

Negotiated between the insurance companies and DEFRA, the scheme was intended to give residents improved access to affordable flood insurance.

- Insurance companies were only interested in insuring against loss, so they were unlikely to invest in the RTS, despite the benefits to many of their customers.
- The EA apologised for any administrative issues surrounding their property level protection. The current scheme was launched in August 2013, and a well-publicised drop-in session took place on 4th November 2013. The scheme was currently under review and was expected to be rolled out further.
- TW explained that floods were outside of their control. Their compensation scheme covered internal and external damage, not loss of service. They were reviewing this situation and it was possible that residents of Friary Road and The Avenue would get compensation.
- A resident highlighted the concerns of those who were not flooded but were unable to live satisfactorily in their homes due to the absence of sewage services, which meant that it all ‘backed up’. TW apologised and explained that the pumping stations were inundated with water. The system was adequate in normal day to day circumstances but TW accepted that there was a need to enhance flood resilience.
- A resident went on to call for TW to offer compensation to all householders, for such a poor service.
- A resident who had been flooded out of his home expressed confusion. One speaker had said it was a one in two hundred and fifty year flood, and another had said it could happen every ten or fifteen years.
- Although it varied from property to property, in some cases water pumps had been used successfully to minimise the damage from rising groundwater.
- On 13th March 2014 the Government was expected to publish full details of its repair and renewal grant. For Wraysbury residents, this would be administered by the Royal Borough. Grants would be offered to a maximum of £5,000 per property. This and other grant funding information could be found on the Borough website. Alternatively, residents could call the Customer Contact Centre.
- A resident suggested that the EA would function better if its ecological work became the responsibility of a separate body. The EA responded by stating that its current asset management was the best that it had ever been. They employed over 4,500 people across southern England. A large number of staff working on ecological projects were available to be called upon during the floods and attended many towns and villages, such as Wraysbury. Species protection would remain an important function, as it was the law of the land.
- A Datchet resident was permitted to address the meeting. He expressed a view that the Jubilee River (JR) channel did not carry its design capacity. He also echoed other residents’ concerns that the channel was operated at midnight and 1am, and that this meant the impacts further downstream were experienced in the early hours of the morning. He suggested that the EA’s use of hydrographs was designed to hide the data.
- The EA explained that the JR had worked well to protect the residents it was designed to protect. They stated that the RTS presented no technical challenges, it just needed to secure the funding.

8. **ThamesAwash**

Chris Bertram, the Chairman of ThamesAwash stated that the lower Thames had experienced increased flooding since the construction of the Jubilee River. He reinforced the need to learn important lessons, but wished to focus his attention on the long-term fix, namely the River Thames Scheme (RTS).

During his presentation the following comments were made:

- ThamesAwash considered that a proposed RTS completion date of 2026 was just not good enough. A commitment to progress it was needed in 2014.
- In 2003 investment promises were made, but to date they had not been acted on.
- The challenge was to keep pressure on central government, local government and the Environment Agency.
- Residents could do this by visiting www.thamesawash.com and registering. This would maximise their mandate in meetings with DEFRA, Ministers and the local MPs.
- There was a need to unite with other communities that suffered, such as Datchet and Shepperton.

9. **CLOSING REMARKS – CLLR A. DAVIES**

The Chairman closed the meeting with a reminder that charitable funds were available from organisations such as the Parochial Charities and the Berkshire Community Foundation. He encouraged residents to seek help from these as well as the Borough and central Government grant funding opportunities. He emphasised the urgent need to build the River Thames Scheme, and for this to be fully funded by central Government. As there were seven local authorities covered by the scheme he suggested that it was a suitable project for fast-tracking, in Planning terms. He also called for the re-introduction of dredging. He informed the meeting that he had written to the Prime Minister requesting the dredging and funding for the RTS.

He concluded by thanking the visiting speakers and residents for their attendance.

..... Chairman

..... Date