Oldbury on Severn Parish Council

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Minutes of the joint meeting of the Flooding and Planning Committee with **South Gloucestershire Council** and **Lower Severn Internal Drainage Board**
Held on Wednesday 17th January 2018 at 2:00pm
At the Memorial Hall, Oldbury on Severn

Present

FPC committee: Keith Sullivan (chair), Dylan Griffiths, Glynn Poole, Barry Turner, Alan Coles, Matthew Riddle, Jimmy Nichols

South Gloucestershire Council: Mark Parry, Andy Wallis

LSIDB: James Druett, James Thomas, Kieron Warren

Clerk: Emma Pattullo

Apologies

Apologies were accepted from John Cornock (FPC), Stella Davies (SGC) and Harriet Ellis (Environment Agency).

1. Introductions

KS thanked all for attending. All attendees introduced themselves.

2. Structure of the meeting

It was suggested that because the SGC presentation covered a number of items listed on the agenda, it would be preferable to depart from the advertised agenda order and cover issues as they came up. The chair accepted this alteration.

AW then gave a presentation which covered items 3 to 6 below. Discussion on each item was held during the presentation.

3. Flap valves

AW reported that survey work has now been carried out to establish and map the location and condition of all non-return valves along Oldbury Naite Rhine and Pickedmoor Rhine. Other locations are also to be assessed. KS requested that a copy of the map and information be supplied to FPC.

Action: AW (SGC) to supply copy of map.

Funding is currently available to SGC to address flooding issues in the Oldbury area. Some of this may be used to reduce the number of valves and make the remainder easier to maintain (e.g. through replacement of some older style flap valves with modern in-line versions). This work would be funded by SGC and carried out by LSIDB or SGC depending on complexity, but ownership of any upgraded/improved valves would remain with the landowner.

KS queried the ownership of existing valves. JT responded that he had emailed on 09/03/17 in response to KS's 'Pipes and Flaps' paper, stating that LSIDB had taken legal advice which had confirmed that the responsibility for maintenance of non-return valves lies with the riparian owner. FPC believe that this remains in dispute.

KS & BT commented that when the banks were raised and valves put in, landowners had no option. The rhine is a designated watercourse therefore LSIDB designate what can be done on it.

JT responded that the IDB act in effect as a regulator of activity; they have permissive powers to act to maintain the banks but no obligation to do so. The Drainage Act says that riparian owners "must maintain a proper flow of water"; a broken valve lets water flow in the wrong direction i.e. this impedes the 'proper flow'. Therefore riparian owners have a legal duty to maintain valves. AW reported that he has seen this same issue in other areas and that there is legal precedent to state that riparian owners have the legal responsibility.

MR suggested that when the scheme was first put in place, landowners would have been paid compensation for works impacting their land. The taking of these compensation payments would imply that they accepted the works and subsequent liabilities. He noted that if SGC or LSIDB put in or maintain structures, they should make it clear to the landowner that this is a 'one off' not an assumption of ongoing liability on the part of SGC/LSIDB.

KS stated that he intended to obtain a legal opinion on behalf of Oldbury parishioners.

Action: KS to pursue legal opinion on ownership of and responsibility for valves.

MP agreed that SGC will write to landowners to explain the planned works and to notify the landowner of their future responsibility for maintenance.

Action: MP (SGC) to contact relevant landowners.

A query was raised as to what maintenance modern flaps would need. AW answered that the main need is for regular debris clearance and checks for damage. The seals may need replacing after 20-25 years.

4. Telemetry

AW presented a map of existing and planned telemetry systems in the area. SGC are installing a rain gauge at the IDB depot and water level sensors on Oldbury Naite Rhine and Pickedmoor Lane Rhine. This work should be completed in April 2018. The Environment Agency are also installing water level sensors on both sides of the tidal outfall (expected February 2018).

KS asked whether the data will be available in real time. AW responded that SGC and LSIDB will be able to view the data in real time. Automatic alarms can also be set to trigger when critical levels are reached. It is hoped that in the future this data might also be available for real time viewing by the public (via a website) but this is likely to take a while.

BT asked what the reporting frequency of the rain gauge will be. AW responded that it can be varied but would typically be every 15 minutes.

BT asked whether groundwater level monitoring would also be put in place as levels are often very high in Oldbury. AW responded that there were no plans for monitoring in Oldbury but that there was some in the Thornbury area.

JN asked what was the datum for water level measurements. AW responded that levels would be measured against an arbitrary datum at each gauge but that these would be converted to AOD for reporting purposes.

5. Bank levels

AW: Following on from survey work carried out in October, it has been established that a number of stretches of banks in the area upstream of Oldbury village are lower than the crest levels of the defences through Oldbury (~6.5m AOD). So if water levels were to ever become high enough to overtop in Oldbury, these upstream areas would have to have flooded before. The upstream flood plain areas are extensive, meaning it is 'almost impossible' for the defences in Oldbury to be overtopped from fluvial sources. It should be noted that this does not take account of tidal issues or problems within the drainage system such as failed flap valves. It is believed that the flooding event in March 2016 was due to water coming back through flap valves and to highway drainage issues.

KS reported that a group of parishioners had carried out their own minor works to raise the bank levels in places within the village after observing that water levels had been very close to overtopping the bank. This work was done at around the same time as the bank height survey, thus the survey may have observed the 'improved' condition rather than that in existence at the time of the March 2016 floods.

BT noted that the SFRA2 also concluded that upstream areas would flood well before Oldbury did, but noted that flows through West End Rhine may have contributed to the March '16 flood event.

6. Highway drainage works

AW reported that additional highway drainage works are planned in the Church Hill area to minimise flooding on the road. The historic and current drainage system design is determined by the location of the former tidal outfall, at the bridge on Oldbury Naite Rhine. Two options are under consideration:

1) A new drainage route running north from the bottom of Church Hill, to discharge below the bridge; and
2) A new drainage route diverting flows westward via Cowhill Wharf Rhine.

SGC are undertaking detailed work to determine the best option. Option (1) would be a highway drain for which SGC would have responsibility. Option (2) would be a drainage ditch and would offer more storage capacity. JD stated that if option (2) were selected, the IDB would add the new ditch to their annual maintenance contract.

BT reminded the meeting that a third option has previously been proposed by Oldbury Parish Council, discharging via the existing outfall but with a new route running diagonally north-east from the back of Christmas Cottage, cutting off some of the corners which currently impede flow.

KS commented that option (1) above would be disruptive to the village during construction, but that if it presented that best long term improvement then the disruption would be worthwhile. DG agreed that this looked like the most efficient route.

In Chapel Road there are a number of gullies, each with their own outfalls. SGC are investigating the feasibility of re-routing these gullies into a common drain with a single outfall to the rhine.

SGC are also looking into reducing drainage into the Church Road ditches, to reduce the amount of water going through the village.

KS asked when the village could expect highway drainage works to actually take place. MP replied that the funding has to be spent before March 2019, but that it would be preferable to undertake this type of work over the summer period i.e. by the end of summer 2018.

MP agreed to arrange further discussion with FPC once plans are more advanced.

Action: MP (SGC) to arrange further meeting with FPC to discuss highway drainage plans.

7. Hill Pill

JT reported that the Environment Agency are clearing siltation from in front of the Hill Pill outfall to allow the flap to open fully, which will allow greater discharge flow. Due to this work and the results of survey work reported earlier, the previous proposal of transferring flows from Oldbury catchment into Hill Pill is now less of a priority as it would not significantly decrease flood risk to Oldbury. The IDB are going ahead with developing a scheme but are not confident that such a scheme would be accepted by their management board.

KS presented some photos from around the Hill Pill outfall showing the current level of siltation. There is also a structure just upstream of the outfall which is very narrow and presumably restricts flow. JD agreed that the structure is narrow, but it cannot be altered as the structure is listed. If a flow increase scheme goes ahead, it is possible that this structure could be by passed.

JN and KS objected to the statement that transfer of flows to the Hill catchment is now lower priority – stating that every contribution towards reducing the amount of water passing through Oldbury is a contribution to lowering flood risk. JT countered that it wouldn't make any difference to water levels during periods of high flow, as the survey work has shown that water would flood into the upstream flood plains (via stretches of bank with lower crest heights) before levels were high enough to overtop in Oldbury village.

MR noted that any future scheme must be evidence based and not just move problems to the Hill catchment. He suggested that increased flows in Hill Pill would be advantageous in that higher flow would increase scouring and prevent or lessen future siltation.

JT replied that the point re: scouring was correct, but repeated that it won't make a difference to flood risk in Oldbury.

8. Pumps

The possible installation of pumps to move fluvial flows into the estuary at periods of high tide has been discussed in the past. KS noted that this is an expensive option, estimated at £1 million once emergency generation capacity and civil engineering works are included. However if a major flood event were to happen, the costs are likely to be much greater than £1 million.

AW commented that it is a matter of balancing risks – the installation of pumps would require a definite spend of a large amount of money and this must be balanced against the risk of a greater cost. If other options can reduce the risk to an acceptable level, what benefit would pumps give? AW had been involved in the Somerset Levels flood event when large pumps were used, this effort involved about 15 pumps which involved most of the high volume pumps available in Europe at that time. The costs, including hire charges and diesel, ran into thousands of pounds per day. Significant amounts of civil engineering works would be needed to facilitate pumps whether these were permanent or temporary. Based on the available evidence, AW does not believe that it is worth preparing a detailed cost-benefit analysis (as listed on LLFA gantt chart document provided at previous meeting) and SGC are not pursuing this option further at this stage. FPC felt it should still be pursued.

9. Tidal Flood Risk

Responsibility for tidal defences rests with the Environment Agency. As their representative was not able to attend the meeting, it was agreed that no useful discussion could be held.

10. Developments in Thornbury

KS explained that whilst each of the new development sites in Thornbury have planned attenuation ponds or similar measures which the developers state will negate any increase in run-off flows to the Pickedmoor Brook. FPC is concerned that whilst each application is assessed in isolation, there has been no assessment of any possible cumulative impacts from the developments as a whole.

AW responded that each application has been assessed to ensure that the design meets acceptable risk levels. He acknowledged that some local residents do not believe this is the case but stated that SGC do not intend to do anything more.

MR raised the issue of maintenance of the attenuation systems in the future. SGC have taken action in other areas, e.g. Emersons Green, where new developments have not been sufficiently maintained.

MP replied that SGC have a robust team in place that will monitor the state of the attenuation systems on an ongoing basis. Developers have the option to set up a management company to address future responsibilities. SGC have legal powers to ensure maintenance is carried out and can serve notices requiring works if necessary.

JN asked what would happen if such a management company went bankrupt?

AW responded that the management company would be owned by the residents of the new development and as such they would be collectively liable for maintenance.

DG noted that the Oldbury fluvial defence scheme was designed when Thornbury was much smaller. Whilst he acknowledged that the newer development areas may well have robust attenuation systems in place, some of those from earlier years probably do not. Who is looking at the overall picture?

MP responded that SGC have acknowledged the concerns of Oldbury residents and that run-off attenuation is a high priority when looking at new developments.

BT noted that the SFRA2 assessment only looked at one development opportunity, namely Park Farm. Since that work was initiated there have been lots more developments either proposed or agreed. The SFRA2 is the basis for flood assessment in the current local plan but is based on out-dated information.

MP responded that the LLFA team have regular discussions with their Planning colleagues to raise these concerns. They have a theoretical understanding of what would happen in a major rain event but can't be 100% certain.

MR asked whether there was an easy way to update the SFRA2 to take account of the increased amount of development?

AW responded that the LLFA team are thinking of developing a surface water management plan for the Thornbury area, which will allow a more strategic approach. Developers could be required to make improvements to surface drainage beyond the boundaries of their sites, to provide an overall improvement.

Councillors noted that although the LLFA have stated that the designs of new developments will reduce run-off flows compared to the green field state, councillors get regular questions from cynical parishioners about this issue.

MP responded that parishioners will be seeing physical works in Oldbury in the coming months; these will reduce or remove a number of risk factors and hopefully lessen residents' concerns.

Councillor Riddle left the meeting at this point to attend another engagement.

11. Post Farm

BT noted that during the approval process for the Post Farm development site, the LLFA had objected to the developer's initial proposals for surface drainage which were to use an existing ditch along the power station road, discharging to Pickedmoor Rhine. It was eventually agreed that surface drainage issues could be controlled via conditions on the full planning approval and that options would be looked at following the granting of outline permission. What further progress had been made?

AW responded that conditions had been approved for the first phase of the Post Farm development, but not yet for subsequent phases. Surface water in the area actually goes via a highway drain under the road and hence northwards into Oldbury Naite Rhine. The first phase of development was required to connect into this system, with some improvement works. SGC are still in discussion with the developers, the Environment Agency and Wessex Water regarding drainage options for future phases. The developer has proposed discharging via a Wessex Water surface water drain to Oldbury Rhine but SGC are still in discussion with the developer on this issue. It was agreed that SGC will send a written update to FPC when this issue is agreed.

Action: MP (SGC) to update FPC regarding surface water drainage from Post Farm development.

12. Future meetings

SGC will arrange to meet with FPC to present detailed plans for highway drainage works and flap valve maintenance/replacement programme. The timescale for this meeting will depend on when plans are developed but the aim would be to meet by June 2018..

13. AOB

The representatives from SGC and LSIDB were thanked for attending.

Meeting closed at 16:10.