

minutes



Meeting FLOODING (DRAINAGE AND WATERCOURSES)
SELECT COMMITTEE

Date Monday, 31 March 2008 (commencing at 10.30 am)

Membership

Persons absent are marked with `A`

COUNCILLORS

Yvonne Davidson (Chair)
Andy Stewart (Vice-Chair)

	John Carter		Sue Saddington
A	John Clarke	A	Dave Shaw
	Tom Pettengell		Yvonne Woodhead
	Ken Rigby		

NON-VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS

Councillor Michael Bennett - Bassetlaw District Council
Councillor Melvyn Shaw - Newark and Sherwood District Council
Councillor Mel Shepherd - Gedling Borough Council

MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting held on 25 February 2008, having been circulated, were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor John Clarke.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

None.

ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

Paul Lockhart, Area Flood Risk Manager, Environment Agency (EA) gave a presentation on the Agency's role, which was in relation to the main rivers. He circulated a list of current flood prevention schemes across the county. He referred to the Pitt review, and to the possibility of the EA being given a strategic overview of flooding. He said that the EA was working closely with Severn Trent and the highways authority.

Councillor Saddington questioned the impact of the left bank flood prevention scheme on villages further downstream, and of developments on flood plains. Councillor Davidson pointed out that these topics had been covered by the previous flooding review. Mr Lockhart indicated that there should be no increased risk of flooding below Bleasby as a consequence of the left bank scheme. He shared Councillor Saddington's concerns about flood plain developments. He stated that possible flood prevention projects were assessed on a cost/benefit basis.

Councillor Stewart supported the concept of the EA being given a strategic overview, which no organisation had at present. He was grateful for support from the County Council and Regional Flood Defence Committee for flood prevention work.

Councillor Rigby pointed out that the flooding in June/July 2007 had been in areas away from expensive flood defence schemes, as a result of heavy, localised rainfall. He asked whether the EA was carrying out the routine maintenance for which it was responsible. Mr Lockhart replied that the EA did a lot of routine maintenance, since it was important that smaller watercourses were not blocked. If residents or a councillor reported a problem, an EA inspector would visit to assess the risk. He pointed out that many different individuals and organisations were responsible for watercourses. He supported Newark and Sherwood District Council's mapping project. He commented that an outcome of the Pitt review might be mapping on a similar basis nationally. He said there were 40 flood warden schemes in Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire and Derbyshire, and the EA was happy to meet parish councils regarding new schemes. Councillor Davidson pointed out that the EA should consider setting up schemes via other local bodies in those parts of the county without parish councils.

SEVERN TRENT WATER

Margaret Burrup, Severn Trent Water, gave a presentation on the company's role. She stated that many private drains were unadopted, and had never been raised to an adoptable standard. Public sewers in June/July 2007 had been overwhelmed by the rainfall, compounded by underlying problems affecting their capacity, such as fat deposits and debris. The public could report faults on the company's 0800 number. She explained that drains were designed to cope with a one in 40 year storm, which could still be beaten. In relation to home insurance, she stated that the company encouraged householders to take out cover for fire and theft, even if no cover for flooding was available. She commented that it might be worth householders challenging the information on flood risk maps. Mr Lockhart pointed out that EA maps could not be used to assess an individual property's risk, and householders should contact EA for more detail. Ms Burrup said that Severn Trent kept a private register of properties at risk from sewerage flooding, and such properties featured in an ongoing programme of preventative work.

There was discussion about district council Environment Health's role in relation to pollution of drains with fat and other material, with mention made of materials being washed out of wheelie bins. Councillor Davidson asked for clarification at the next meeting about respective responsibilities.

Councillor Saddington believed that Severn Trent should be a statutory consultee on planning applications. She referred to the pressure on drains from a succession of small developments in village locations. She suggested more education about what

should not be put down drains. In reply to Councillor Rigby, Ms Burrup explained that the company was reluctant to use its Section 111 enforcement powers, but did work in partnership with district councils, such as Gedling. Mr Lockhart said that the EA had an enforcement officer, but the agency sought to resolve problems by negotiation to avoid the expense of litigation.

Councillor Carter asked about the distinction between surface drains and foul water sewers. Ms Burrup explained that the two became combined at some point, meaning that surface water went through expensive sewage treatment processes, which was far from ideal. She indicated that the adopted drains were mapped, but private drains were not. Mr Lockhart stated that planning authorities could be helpful by for example insisting on sustainable urban drainage systems for new developments.

WORK PROGRAMME

Martin Gately, Scrutiny Officer, referred to the Select Committee's wish for British Waterways to give evidence. He pointed out that British Waterways' responsibilities were limited to dredging navigable waterways. Mr Lockhart stated that British Waterways' interest was in maintaining navigation. Dredging was carried out approximately every five years, to clear accumulations of silt and debris. It was, he said, and expensive and environmentally damaging process, which the EA no longer carried out.

There was discussion about the involvement of parish councils in the review, with the conclusion that they be invited to attend on 28 April. Councillor Davidson asked that representatives from areas without parish councils also be invited. It was agreed that the detailed arrangements be decided after consulting the Chair and Vice-Chair. It was also agreed to hold an additional meeting of the select committee in May, when it would visit Lowdham.

It was noted that on 19 May the Select Committee would visit North Leverton. The travel arrangements were to be decided.

It was noted that the County Council's response to the Pitt review was being prepared through the Local Resilience Forum, and that Councillor Gilfoyle would be responding formally. Mr Gately pointed out that the Pitt review indicated that scrutiny meetings should be held in flood risk areas as a matter of routine, and that local authority scrutiny committees should undertake an ongoing monitoring role around flooding.

The meeting closed at 12.00 noon.

CHAIR