

# NOTES ON LONGPARISH FLOODING - DECEMBER 2013 TO MARCH 2014

## INTRODUCTION

Winter 2013/2014 has already been described as the wettest on record - worse than 2001 and 2003, when the School was particularly affected. Many homes in the Middleton area of Longparish also lost power on 23 Dec 13 as a result of the first severe storm, which was not restored until the early evening of 26 Dec. The Sugar Lane springs were running by early Jan and by then it was becoming clear that a difficult time was ahead.

Following an Environment Agency (EA) flood alert for the Upper Test on 11 Feb 14, with the river and groundwater levels continuing to rise slowly, and a Meteorological (Met) Office forecast of a further 30mm of rain during the next day or so the Parish Council (PC) issued guidance on 12 Feb and convened an informal flood planning meeting of the PC and others who could have something to contribute, which was held in the Village Hall on 13 Feb. The aim was to share ideas (and experiences) to determine what action could (and should) sensibly be taken and to review the situation with regard to the level of water in the main sewers. There were no minutes of this meeting, but the PC circulated a further note on the Longparish Community Association (LCA) net that was also posted on the village website.<sup>1</sup> Supplementary guidance was issued on 28 Feb and displayed on the village notice-boards.<sup>2</sup>

Martin Hatley from Test Valley Borough Council (TVBC) notified the PC on 27 Feb that David Drew<sup>3</sup> would support the Harewood Ward while Jim Neal was away. David circulated a series of TVBC updates from 27 Feb summarising the position across the Test Valley. From reading these it is clear that:

- Longparish escaped relatively lightly compared to some other Test Valley villages and coped very well, but that is not in any way to understate the lot of the few who were affected. The rest of this paper should be read in this context.
- Ongoing frustration with Southern Water (SW) is a common thread throughout the updates. In Longparish, it was the delay in arranging the over-pumping. On 27 Feb SW undertook to have the pumps in place by 3 Mar - in the event they were not commissioned until 10 Mar.
- The reduction in groundwater levels will be a slow and gradual process.

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1 In essence, the initial guidance provided an overall update on; how to register for EA flood warnings, how to prepare for flooding, the provision of sandbags by TVBC, how to contact SW regarding the pump house [previously issued to nearby houses in 2009], and the importance of liaising with neighbours.

2 The 28 Feb update outlined the current situation, and stressed the importance of driving slowly in first gear through flooded areas in order to prevent bow waves washing against properties and sweeping gravel and mud into the drains.

3 A former County Councillor and the prospective Conservative candidate for the Harewood Ward in the May 2015 election.

- There is a great deal of repair and maintenance work to be undertaken - and, as always, lessons to be learned or reinforced as many of them remain the same as in previous emergencies.<sup>4</sup>

The school is often the first to notice when the pumps at the pump-house opposite the Plough Inn are not working, or not working to capacity, and it was already experiencing some problems in early to mid Jan. During the week commencing 27 Jan, the school was on the point of closure - the toilets would not flush and sewage was backing up into classroom sinks. SW responded to their concerns and on 31 Jan the school secretary reported that a SW employee had indicated that the pumps had been fixed and were now working to capacity. However, he also indicated that the problems were also due to the huge amount of water in the system and a blockage between the school and the Plough. This, together with a constriction near the shop suggested that SW had not been doing regular routine maintenance to remove blockages to ensure the sewers were clear. Incidentally, clearing the problem near the shop simply moved the problem further down the village.

Following the last storm on 14/15 Feb the groundwater levels continued to rise, but matters started to improve noticeably during the dry spell in the second week of March. It is not known how much the over-pumping equipment, which was still in situ on 27 Mar, was used, but tankering near the Plough continued. The same storm also caused the smaller Forton pumping station to 'trip out'. SW was unaware of this as their telemetry indicated that it was working and therefore ignored the calls from local residents who were being flooded until the following night. The solution was merely to re-set the telemetry, but again it highlighted that calls for help should be taken seriously.

***Aim of this Paper:*** At its meeting on 10 Mar, the PC agreed to collate lessons learned from this winter emergency. These are summarised below, so that they can be recorded, discussed and followed up as required. When considering this paper the PC may wish to minute that it is grateful to the following individuals and agencies for their support during the emergency:

- Middleton Estate;
- Caroline Nokes MP, Andrew Gibson ([HCC local member) and David Drew (covering for Jim Neal, TVBC local member);
- TVBC staff worked around the clock from 7 Feb to deal with flooding issues across the Borough - their efforts were much appreciated;
- SW staff and contractors, particularly the pump-house team and the individual tanker drivers, for the hours worked during the emergency;
- The residents of Longparish who worked together as a community to help each other.

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<sup>4</sup> A review of PC correspondence in Apr 2003 highlights; the need to keep gullies clear, the need for SW to share their contingency plans, that it is too late to start tankering when the flood has already happened, and, in the longer term, the need for SW to ensure that their system is adequate to cope with the demands placed on it.

## LESSONS AND PROPOSED ACTIONS

### General:

There is a role for the PC in drainage and water management - a matter that should be reviewed in PC business as each winter approaches. Reconstituting the Drainage and Water Management Group - see Annexes A and B - would seem to be the best forum for reviewing these lessons and determining how best to bring pressure to bear regarding sewer and pump-house refurbishment.

As in 2001 and 2003, and despite significant SW investment re-lining stretches of the sewers since then<sup>5</sup> and investment in the pump-house during 2007/08, the main flooding threat to the village remains groundwater, which manifests in three ways:

- Springs (for example the River Sugar);
- Ingress of ground water the sewer network leading to overflowing and toilets not working [the toilets appear to be mainly effected when the pump - house fails or the pumps are not working to capacity];
- Surface water overwhelming the drains and gulleys;

The most significant of these factors is the egress of ground and surface water into the sewers coupled with the distinct threat of pump-house failure. The level of the sewer flooding this winter has been correspondingly worse than it has ever been. There therefore seems little prospect of SW solving the overall sewer situation in the short to medium term, but refurbishing the main pump-house to make it more resilient may be a more achievable target.<sup>6</sup>

The PC appreciates that The Middleton Estate does a great deal behind the scenes to offset flooding problems - for instance by diverting water down the 'Far Water', thus reducing the level in the main river. The PC would benefit from more insight/understanding about the Estate's role in this and what they are able to do - perhaps the Estate should be asked to give a talk on how the river and sluices are managed.

### ***Significant points:***

- Property owners need to keep their drains, gulleys and ditches clear, especially where they are piped under driveways.
- SW should check the sewers regularly to ensure that there are no blockages or constrictions

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<sup>5</sup> Carried out in Oct/Dec 2011. It would be interesting to know what difference SW feel the recent sewer re-lining made to the overall situation - there must be some benefit.

<sup>6</sup> Perhaps it should also just be borne in mind here that the groundwater has to go somewhere and it could just make things worse if it cannot filter into the sewers - which leads back to the importance of ditching - see below.

- Owners of low-lying houses should be made aware of the risks of digging/developing down, which can, and did, exacerbate the effects of groundwater at some properties.
- More 'slow down' signs may be needed in future emergencies and the public need to be better educated about the effects of speeding. The use of wheelie bins may also help, as was the case in at Hurstbourne Tarrant and Upton.
- Significant problems were caused by drains being blocked by gravel washed from driveways. The Planning Portal recommends a strip of block paving or asphalt at the entrance to limit the loss and spread of gravel from the drive.

### **Hampshire County Council (HCC):**

By way of follow-up:

- HCC should be asked if they are incorporating lessons learned from this winter in their Groundwater Management Plan. Our PC comments on the draft were submitted in Dec 13 and remain pertinent; they were acknowledged, but no further feedback has been received.
- The Surface Water Plan remains outstanding and this needs to be addressed and integrated with the Groundwater Plan. A proportion of the groundwater leaking into the sewers is entering through submerged manhole covers. This requires increasing the capacity of the surface water drainage system, which is HCC's responsibility.
- Arrangements for gully/drain cleaning (HCC) and road-sweeping (TVBC) need to be coordinated so that, for example, the autumn leaves are cleared/swept before they are washed into the drains and the drains are cleared before the winter and the advent of higher groundwater levels.

**Ditching:** There was much on the news during the emergency about the importance of ditching. In commenting on the need to re-learn lost skills, a recent article in the Hampshire Chronicle (27 Feb) said, 'We are re-learning water management practices that millers, farmers and town councillors would have known 100 years ago.' With the recent heavy rainfall causing flooding across Buckinghamshire, Transport for Buckinghamshire (TfB) is launching a campaign aimed at encouraging landowners to play their part in clearing ditches on their land. More details are at Annex C - what is HCC doing about this?

### **Test Valley Borough Council:**

The updates circulated by TVBC and referred to above were useful, as seeing how other villages fared helped the PC to maintain a balanced response to Longparish difficulties. When did the Customer Services Unit/Emergency Control Unit open and when did the updates first start - did the PC miss out on the early editions?

The distribution of sandbags worked very well and efficiently once the EA flood alert had been given and government confirmed that the bags were free - TVBC distributed some 40,000 sandbags to residences and businesses as well as a further 40,000 to bolster defences at Romsey. Plans for sandbag recovery published and collection took place in w/c 14 Apr.

TVBC needs to liaise with HCC regarding the coordination of road-sweeping and drain clearance (see comments under HCC above).

Closer more regular liaison with SW is essential - see comments below; problems will only be solved once SW get a grip on the whole sewer. In light of their experiences, perhaps it is time to see if TVBC could become more involved in liaison with SW regarding future plans for the Test Valley. There is a case to be made for them to be rather more proactive in getting things done for the future, rather than simply reactive [even if effectively] when things go wrong.

**Local Plan:** In commenting recently on the Local Plan, the PC said that it was: '...specifically concerned about the sewerage and waste water infrastructure in Longparish, which runs down the Bourne Valley from Hurstbourne Tarrant, and which, as recent events have shown, becomes severely overloaded in periods when the groundwater is high. More broadly, full account must be taken of the resilience and capacity of the sewage system as a whole before development is permitted, and it is not enough to place total reliance on advice from the privatised water utility company to determine whether the infrastructure can cope with further development. There is also a need to ensure that the surface water drainage system is adequate and that a coordinated approach is taken to determining the capacity of the water.'

The PC therefore feels that waste water infrastructure in the low-lying villages should receive very careful attention when any new development is being considered. The money to fund improvements is simply not available at this time of austerity. It needs some bold action such as this to really highlight the problem and get something done.

### **Southern Water:**

SW seems to be a rather 'stove pipe' organisation - as evidenced by the number of management staff referred to in various emails circulated during the emergency - and, somehow, the PC needs to re-establish liaison with them again and try and get them to see that it is in their interest to build up trust/confidence with their customer base, rather than have to deal with the wave of criticism when things go wrong.<sup>7</sup> What is needed is one point of

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<sup>7</sup> It is also noticeable that all too often the pump-house machinery seems to be being maintained by operatives who simply come to do a job - SW has lost the local knowledge/involvement that it used to have. During the night of 19/20 Mar, both the low flow and one of the two larger high flow (storm) pumps broke down leaving just the third pump in operation. Theoretically, either storm pump is capable of passing forward the maximum flow allowed, but the last pump standing was struggling to do so in the early hours. None of the operatives that attended was aware of the over-pumping equipment or the extent of the tankering operation still in progress.

contact again, as was achieved in 2007. Coupled with this is the need for contingency planning, best illustrated by the calendar of events below:

- On 25 Feb,<sup>8</sup> Andy Shaddick from SW told Caroline Nokes MP that 'the plan was to over-pump at the school end of the village as this was the nearest point to the village and it would relieve pressure on the whole village'. At that time, they had not approached the EA for permission.
- On 26 Feb, JF reported a conversation he had with Mike James from SW. In essence, they would keep tankering at the Plough and the Cricketers until they could start over-pumping from a manhole near the playground, at which time there would be a very rapid improvement. However, for various practical reasons, it might take up to a week before they could start this.
- On 27 Feb, Mike James further confirmed that they would use the playground manhole as soon as possible. The SW meeting with the Estate, on whose land the pumps and hoses would be laid, did not take place until 5 Mar - and commissioning not until 10 Mar.
- It is therefore felt that SW should have been preparing for the possibility of over-pumping from 5 Feb (when they re-started tankering) and not left it until 25 Feb thereby wasting two, if not three, weeks. All this reinforces the need for contingency planning and preparing a plan in advance. They should know, for example, where over-pumps are likely to be needed and who the landowners are. It is far too late to start on this work in the middle of a flooding emergency

Whilst tankering helps reduce waste water levels in the sewers, over-pumping is much more effective and less risky to residents. Therefore, given the lack of investment, the need for over-pumping will remain an essential plank in contingency planning.<sup>9</sup> SW has made the point that they are not a 'flood relief' agency and the main purpose of the tankering is simply to maintain waste water services to their customers. However, the two problems are inextricably linked as long as there is surface and groundwater ingress into their sewers on the present scale.

### **Environment Agency:**

The EA need to:

- make sure that future warnings are appropriate to the conditions in the localities concerned. Dire warnings caused unnecessary worry.
- re-visit their maps of properties which may be flooded in the light of experience.

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<sup>8</sup> Nothing appears to have been done about over-pumping before 25 Feb.

<sup>9</sup> The over-pumping at St Mary Bourne shows that the EA has already accepted the principle of discharge into the river. The risk of significant pollution seems minimal - SW take care to avoid taking solids from the manhole and further filtering is undertaken before the waste water enters the river. In other words, the waste water pumped into the river is very diluted.

## Parish Council:

In summary, the PC need to:

- Discuss the HCC and TVBC lessons above with Andrew Gibson and David Drew/Jim Neal and proceed accordingly;
- HCC is now faced with an enormous Highways repair bill and the PC must continue to prioritise, register and press for village potholes to be dealt with as soon as possible;
- Discuss the SW lessons with Mike James;
- Examine the Southern Water St Mary Bourne Ground Water infiltration plan and establish why it does not include Longparish and what SW plans are to address issues in Longparish  
<http://www.southernwater.co.uk/about-us/about-southern-water/our-publications/our-reports/infiltration-reduction-plan.asp>;
- Liaise with Vernham Dean, Hurstbourne Tarrant, St Mary Bourne and Hurstbourne Priors PCs to present a common view to SW and other agencies. See for example this item in the StMB PC draft minutes of 8 April 2014, "**5.13 (not on agenda): Bourne Valley Flood Mitigation:** Invite from Vernham Dean PC? (the sender claims that VD PC have agreed to this) to link up with Upton, Hurstbourne Tarrant and SMB for an Emergency Response Plan and lobbying for capital flood defence schemes."

## ANNEXES:

- A. **Drainage and Water Management Group.**
- B. **Hill and Valley article on minimising flood risk - July 2008.**
- C. **Ditching.**

## ANNEX A

### DRAINAGE AND WATER MANAGEMENT GROUP

#### BACKGROUND

Mindful of the pump-house problems in 2001 and 2003, and following a series of further serious pump failures during Aug 2007, the PC determined to establish an informal Drainage and Water Management Working Group in Sep 2007 to look at all aspects of flood minimisation in the village. The original members were Tim Sweet (Chairman), Jeremy Barber, Christopher Duxbury, Phil Harris and the Late Trevor Elkins. The initial Terms of Reference are below and an article for the Jul 2008 edition of Hill and Valley was produced - see Annex B. Christopher Duxbury established liaison with SW (George Thomas - Area Works Officer) and meetings - including a visit to the pump-house - were held in Oct which led to a significant pump refurbishment programme resulting in very few further problems until Christmas 2012. Jeremy Barber arranged an

interesting meeting with EA on river matters, and weed cutting dates are now published annually in Hill and Valley.

The liaison carried on successfully for 18 months or so, but once the pump refurbishment programme had been completed, and with no further problems, it inevitably petered out. Christopher Duxbury attempted to resuscitate the arrangement in autumn 2012 - George Thomas had moved on promotion, but he was put in touch with his successor (Neil Hawkes). This liaison has also come to nothing following the pump problems in Dec 2012.

## **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Drainage and Water Management Group's remit was:

1. To assist the PC and other local interested parties in understanding the drainage and water management issues affecting the village, and to be fully aware of flood risk issues.
2. To establish and maintain informal contact with relevant parties, including Southern Water, the Environment Agency, TVBC, HCC, and local landowners.
3. As far as possible to be aware of any likely flood risks in the near future, for example through use of EA flood warning service.
4. To advise on action which could be taken to reduce the risk of flooding.
5. To maintain an up-to-date list of key contact details.



## **HILL AND VALLEY ARTICLE - MINIMISING FLOODING RISK - JULY 2008**

Following the very heavy rain last summer, the Parish Council set up a working group to look at how to minimise the risk of flooding in the village. The members are Jeremy Barber, Christopher Duxbury, Trevor Elkins, Phil Harris and Tim Sweet.

The first thing to report is that risks in Longparish are low. Villages like St Mary Bourne, Shipton Bellinger and parts of Andover and Romsey have much greater risks. But in the last few years we have seen some exceptional events which have brought water quite close to some properties. So what has happened and what can we do to minimise our risk?

The school governors raised the level of the school playing field and it has not flooded since.

We have established good relations with Southern Water, who are responsible for the sewer which goes right through the village. There is a pumping station opposite The Plough which pumps sewage from the whole village, including Forton, plus Hurstbourne Priors, St Mary Bourne and Hurstbourne Tarrant to the treatment works at Barton Stacey. If the pump fails or the system becomes overloaded then sewage can back up causing problems with the drains for some households. Southern Water have improved the telemetry at the pumping station so they can take action more promptly if there is a problem. Residents who detect the signs of a problem can help by contacting Southern Water urgently and reporting it. Make sure you say that the pumping station has failed so they treat the report as urgent. And please don't assume that someone else will report or must have done so already.

The sewer gets overloaded when groundwater levels are high and groundwater leaks into it. This happens particularly in Stoke and St Mary Bourne, but the problem then gets passed on to Longparish! Southern Water are addressing this by an extensive programme of repairs at St Mary Bourne and, if water levels get too high, they use tankers to take water from the sewer. In extremis they also pump from the sewer into the river. Once the repairs are finished the risk will be reduced.

The river level also affects risk. Middleton Estate manage the river level. In the winter they direct part of the flow from the main river to the Far Water. This reduces the level in Middleton and floods the water meadows which helps improve the grazing. In the spring they reduce the water level in the Far Water so the water meadows dry out ready for cattle to graze them. The water is held back by the growing water weed so levels gradually rise until the weed is cut.

Weed cuts are strictly controlled by the Environment Agency which sets dates for three programmes of cutting along the whole river. During these period cut weed is allowed to float downstream and is removed at a weir just this side of Romsey. You may have seen the machinery and the massive heap of weed there.

The first cut is done just after the flush of mayflies known as Duffers' Fortnight. This year the cut was from 8 to 19 June for the stretch of river including Longparish, with 20 and 21 June as clearing off days. You may have noticed that the river level dropped dramatically during the cut. As part of that programme of work Jeff Smith, the water keeper, also cut the weed in the feeder stream which runs to the river from Sugar Lane. The aim of the cutting is to manage the water flows and levels; not to denude the river and stream of weed altogether. Bands of weed are left as necessary to provide cover for fish and invertebrates. The feeder stream is also cleared from the Ash Burn Rest to Sugar Lane on the two village clean-up days, which helps the rate of flow.

This year the next windows for cutting are 14-23 July and 12-20 August. Details of next year's dates will not be known until March 2009. We will publish them in Hill & Valley when they are available.

Weed can be cut any time from 13 October 2008 to 26 April 2009 provided it does not interfere with trout spawning.

If the Environment Agency judge there to be a serious risk to property they may also authorise emergency cuts.

As well as feeding groundwater levels, rain can cause flooding when drains are overwhelmed or not properly maintained. Poor maintenance resulted in long lasting lakes in the B3048 near Meadowsweet and in Forton last year. After pressure from householders, the Parish Council and our borough and county councillors the Highways department cleared the blocked drains and the floods disappeared. In an ideal world they would have a full programme of preventive maintenance but, sadly, life just isn't like that. There was another problem near the School this year which has also been sorted out following similar representations. Resources at Highways are stretched so we have to keep reminding them. If you have a serious problem please take it up direct with Highways.

All in all, then, you will see that there is a careful balance between the needs of householders, farming, wildlife and fishing. A huge amount of work goes on quietly behind the scenes to keep risks low and we are grateful to all concerned for what they do.

If you would like to know more please feel free to contact any member of the group.

## **DITCHING**

### **BACKGROUND**

The vast majority of roadside ditches are owned by the adjoining landowner, except where the County Council has bought land for highway improvement. Ditches across land away from the highway are owned by the landowner across whose land the ditch passes (these landowners are often referred to as Riparian Owners). Ditch owners have a legal responsibility to prevent a hazard being caused to highway users.

All ditches must be maintained regularly to keep them free of silt and other debris to reduce the possibility of flooding. Anyone can approach the owner to clear a ditch. If this is not successful the County Council has legal powers to enforce action at the ditch owner's expense where there is a risk of flooding to the highway. In situations where ditches or watercourses crossing private land present a risk of flooding to property, the internal drainage boards have legal powers to enforce action by the ditch owners. [Who are the internal drainage boards?]

### **WORKING TOGETHER TO DITCH THE PROBLEM - A BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL INITIATIVE**

With the recent heavy rainfall causing flooding across Buckinghamshire, Transport for Buckinghamshire (TfB) is launching a campaign aimed at encouraging landowners to play their part in clearing ditches on their land. Janet Blake, Cabinet Member for Planning and Transportation at Buckinghamshire County Council is leading the campaign to encourage local landowners and farmers to get on board and carry out their duty to clear ditches to assist water flow away from land and roads.

The campaign - 'Working together to Ditch the Problem' - provides benefits for the whole community. Local farmer Michael Turner from Great Brickhill is one farmer who appreciates the benefits of ditch clearance and commented: 'There's definitely a benefit to clearing ditches, as the drains are then able to clear water from the fields. This is particularly good for land which has crops growing. Good drainage means good productive fields.'

Flooding is a complex issue, with many factors that contribute to the problem and many different solutions which need to be put in place to resolve it. Maintaining ditches is one of these solutions and Buckinghamshire County Council will be working on other solutions with the range of stakeholders throughout the County.

Janet said: 'Working together to Ditch the Problem is aimed at landowners. We're sending posters to Parish Councils to display and the National Farmers Union is sending a postcard with key messages out to its farmer members but we know that we need to work with other parties to reduce the flooding problems we've all recently experienced.'