

Notes of the informal meeting between representatives of Lydney Town Council, Forest of Dean District Council, Environment Agency and local residents to discuss flooding

Date of meeting: 30 November 2012

Attendees: Mr Anthony Perry (AP) – Environment Agency
Mr C Johns (CJ) – Forest of Dean District Council
Cllr David Cooksley (DC) – Gloucestershire County Council and Lydney Town Council
Cllr Brian Pearman (BP) – Lydney Town Council
Cllr Bill Osborne (BO) – Lydney Town Council
Mrs J Smailes (JS) – CEO, Lydney Town Council
Miss C Wheeler – EO, Lydney Town Council (Note taker)
14 residents

JS showed AP a number of photographs which had been taken on 21 and 25 November 2012 which recorded the level of flooding which had occurred on the section of the River Lyd which extended over the Recreation Ground and the surrounding areas. AP was informed that Lydney Town Council had called the Harbour Master and the Environment Agency (EA) at approximately 10.15 am on 21 November to request that they open the weir paddles in an effort to reduce the likelihood of flooding, as the River was close to bursting its banks, as locally it was perceived that opening the weir paddles reduced the height of the water. However, the Council had been advised that the opening of the weir gates would not affect the level of the water, which was contrary to the view of residents. It was noted that the River burst its banks later in the afternoon, which caused the Recreation Trust land to become flooded; the properties of Lakeside Gardens were also very nearly flooded. JS then requested that the EA provided the Council with a contact number and code word, which could be used in an emergency situation to authorise the opening of the weir paddles.

AP felt that there would always be measures which could be utilised to reduce risk and advised that water would run off the catchment areas and then into the town. AP advised that in 1994 the EA undertook a scheme to improve/enlarge the channel which ran through the town and in 2004 it undertook refurbishment of the Harbour. AP then advised that the amount of water which could be handled was constrained by the size of the channel and he stressed that every flood was different. WO explained that he, together with a local resident, had visited the Harbour during the time of the flooding and had noted that no water was moving along Harbour Road, however, when WO had insisted that the Harbour Master open the weir paddles (as it was not high tide) the water then began to flow along the section which reduced the height of water in the areas which had been flooded. AP confirmed that the gradient of the stretch would mean that water would flow when the paddles were open, but he stressed that the amount of water passing through the paddles was minimal and that it would not be possible to open the paddles unless there was water coming into the system. AP emphasised that the EA would do their best to assist, however, he stressed that the Harbour Master was not employed on a 24 hour basis. AP also highlighted landowner's riparian ownership responsibilities and he questioned what further improvements could be made to the channel.

Whilst AP agreed that the EA would utilise their best endeavours to put a system in place to gauge the effect of the weir paddles on the water levels, he stressed it was not the EA's job to prevent people from being flooded. Furthermore, the EA had improved its asset (the Docks) to allow a greater flow of water and he reminded those present of the increased amount of rainfall which had been experienced over the last 10 years.

Several questions were raised by members of the public to which replies were given. These questions are summarised below:

Q: It is commonly believed that if the gates are open at the Docks it makes a difference to the level of the River water.

AP: The River has a gradient, which is due to the nature of Lydney

Q: Are the EA able to dredge the River Lyd?

AP: Yes, in theory, however, the effect of smoothing the bed would be negligible. It would be more beneficial to smooth the bank sides and cut back overhanging trees/ remove obstructions.

Q: It was believed that the bottom of the town would have flooded had the Harbour Master not been instructed to open the weir paddles. The District Council support the view that the opening of the paddles does make a difference to the level of the water.

AP: Water has to pass over the River channel before it reaches the EA's asset; the Docks are not a flood control structure.

Q: Following the floods in 1968, a study was undertaken in 1969 on behalf of Lydney Town Council which highlighted the opening of the gates when the tide was out.

AP: It is a different situation now.

Q: It has been noted that a new pipe has been laid as part of the new housing development scheduled for the town and now foul water is appearing on Cambourne Place Meadow.

AP: This is an issue for the Local Authority to address regarding the run off from the development. The EA is not the Planning Authority so planning issues must be addressed by the Forest of Dean District Council (FODDC).

Q: We are concerned over the impact that the new developments will have on the existing drainage system, which is already struggling to cope.

AP: The responsibility for surface drainage lies with the Local Authority. National Planning Policy is designed to make sure that a site is not made worse by the development and as such this should be monitored by FODDC.

Q: Will you confirm that during the next period of flooding you will measure the peak flow?

AP: Yes, the EA has a gauge which is able to measure this.

Q: LTC would like to obtain/produce a full plan of the watercourse and who is responsible for each area/culvert. Are the EA willing to get involved in discussions regarding this matter?

AP: it would be excellent if LTC could produce such a plan. Regarding responsibility, each property owner whose house is situated by a River has riparian ownership responsibilities.

Q: The canal is full of sludge in the two basins; the sewerage station was not pumping during the last flooding; water courses are not being maintained therefore everyone needs to pull together to address the problem. When were the water courses last cleared?

AP: The water course is small, but if they are cleared you will see an improvement.

Q: Although the EA feel that the opening of the weir paddles has no effect on flood levels, many people feel that the opening of the paddles, at the very least, enables the water levels to remain static at the height when the paddles were first opened.

AP: The weir paddles are not large paddles.

Q: Do FODDC monitor the culverts in the town?

CJ: They are monitored before a flood; any trash screens are cleared and litter removed.

Q: The rear of the culvert at Whitehouse Press has totally collapsed and this was notified to FODDC in 2006.

CJ: I will inspect the rear of the culvert.

Q: Some residents have increased the height of their gardens and whilst the EA have stated that legal action should be taken, nothing has happened and the water from the garden is now running onto my property.

AP: I am not aware of this situation. However, if the development has increased the flood risk the EA is able to take action and I will investigate this matter. You would also be able to submit a personal claim against the individual.

Q: FODDC have previously offered residents grants towards the purchase of flood defence boards for their properties. Is there any possibility that this could be offered to residents of Lakeside Gardens?

CJ: In 2009 residents of Lakeside Avenue were offered up to £750 towards the purchase of flood defence boards, however, there was not a large take up. I will enquire if FODDC would be willing to offer the scheme to residents of Lakeside Gardens.

Q: In 2008 FODDC produced a flood module at an estimated cost of £50,000. It was felt that a new scheme was required costing £1M+. Has any progress been made?

CJ: FODDC have applied for Government funding for the scheme, but its application was ranked as low and ultimately failed to secure funding due to the perceived low flooding risk.

Q: There is a large tree which has come now into the water course on the other side of the by-pass. Who is responsible for this?

JS: LTC/Lydney Recreation Trust was made aware of the situation and the tree has now been cleared from the water course despite this being shared riparian ownership. LTC/Lydney Recreation Trust felt it important to take immediate action in our residents best interests.

Q: The pond system introduced as part of the new development does not seem to be working. During the height of the flooding on 25 November 2013 no water was held in the pond and the pipe was only slightly dripping.

CJ: I will look into this matter.

Q: There is a ditch at the rear of 28, 30, 32 and 34 Lakeside Avenue which has not been cleared out.

CJ: I will look into the matter.

During discussion it was felt that residents should not have to cope with sewerage in their garages, as several of the occupiers of premises in Railway Terrace were subjected to. It was noted that Severn Trent switched off the pumping station during the last flood as it was not able to cope. Furthermore, a question was raised about the possibility of using the land on the other side of the by-pass as a flood storage area to which the EA responded that no funding was currently available.