

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

TONBRIDGE FORUM

Monday, 17th February, 2014

Present: Cllr O C Baldock (Chairman), Cllr N J Heslop (Vice-Chairman), Cllr A W Allison, Cllr Mrs J A Anderson, Cllr Ms J A Atkinson, Cllr P F Bolt, Cllr Ms V M C Branson, Cllr R D Lancaster and Cllr Ms S V Spence

Mrs P Bates, D J Cure, M O Davis, B J Luker, Mrs S Murray, M R Rhodes and Miss J L Sergison were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

Members of the Forum: Kent County Councillors Long and Smith, Kent Police, The Skinners Company, Society of Friends, St John Ambulance, Tonbridge Civic Society, Tonbridge District Scouts, Tonbridge Line Commuters, Tonbridge Lions Club, Tonbridge Music Club, Tonbridge Rotary Club, Tonbridge Sports Association, Tonbridge Theatre and Arts Club, Tonbridge Town Team, University of the Third Age and the Women's Institute.

Together with representatives from the Environment Agency, Kent County Council and Southern Water Services and Sir John Stanley MP.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs M F Heslop and D J Trice

PART 1 - PUBLIC

TF 14/1 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 25 November 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

TF 14/2 EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO FLOODING

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced representatives from the Environment Agency, Southern Water Services, Kent County Council Highways and Transportation and Kent Police, together with Sir John Stanley MP and officers from Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council.

It was explained that the meeting would focus on the multi-agency response to the recent flooding in and around Tonbridge. Members were advised of the Borough Council's commitment to identify practical incidents from those events and, in particular, to learn from them. The process of finding answers had already started with the Borough Council

coordinating responses following comments at other local residents meetings.

The participation and attendance of the other agencies highlighted the multi-agency nature of addressing flooding and demonstrated the commitment to constructively move forward together to make practical progress.

Members received a presentation from the Environmental Agency (EA) Area Manager (Mr Andrew Pearce) and his technical adviser (Mr Neil Gunn) which set out the context of the flooding event, the role and responsibilities of the EA and the procedures involved in co-ordinating a multi-agency response. It was reported that there appeared to be three main contributing factors to the flooding:

- (1) Intense rainfall
- (2) Overflowing drains
- (3) River Medway bursting its banks

The EA apologised to the communities affected by flooding and promised to identify problems and potential solutions to prevent future occurrences by meeting with local residents. In addition, the EA committed to closer engagement with communities by hosting a number of small surgeries and working groups. Residents were encouraged to participate to enable as much information as possible to be collected, which in turn would inform potential answers.

Actions already identified by the EA included:

- A river bank survey
- Sandbag wall along Avebury Avenue/Barden Road
- Trialling of new warning and informing procedure
- Updated flood warning procedure with the threshold changed with immediate effect
- Revised procedure for operation of the flood storage area to account for blockages and loss of storage/capacity

With regard to the new warning and informing procedure it was explained that warnings would only be issued in daylight hours if possible and the anticipated list would be shared with co-ordinating agencies who would then attempt to resource communication to residents. It was reported that the warning system was for river flooding only and not for surface water or foul flooding.

Short term measures identified for action by the EA included:

- Setting up a technical group. Residents and community groups/representatives were encouraged to participate.
- Removing trees
- Stabilising Buleys Weir

- Reinstating Avebury/Barden high ground
- Investigating the potential and demonstrating value for money for a scheme at Hildenborough
- Publishing a flood report highlighting lessons learnt from recent events.

Medium term measures identified for action by the EA included:

- A flood warden scheme: This would improve understanding of local flood risk and communication
- Increase capacity in the Leigh Flood Storage Area
- Seeking funding from DEFRA for Capital Schemes, such as Hildenborough

Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council summarised the emergency response of the authority and advised of the following immediate actions to be progressed:

- The use of Tonbridge Castle as a multi-agency base for use in emergencies
- Immediate and continuing restocking of sand bags
- Increased core stock of sand bags
- Train additional Incident Liaison Officers
- Lobby for further increase in capacity for flood water storage at Leigh
- Local agreement with Kent County Council for Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council to implement road closures during a flooding emergency

The Chief Executive of the Borough Council reported that officers were currently identifying and 'mapping' the properties affected by flooding and superimposing causes of the flooding to identify specific problems. The intention was then to inform and liaise with relevant parties including Kent County Council, EA, Internal Drainage Boards and private landowners on these issues.

Questions were invited from the Members of the Forum and it was reported that full responses to those concerns raised by residents at previous public meetings, together with additional issues raised this evening, would be shared via the Borough Council's website and email circulation where possible. Residents were encouraged to ask specific questions at the community surgery events.

Serious discussion was given to a range of issues and concerns, including improvements to the warning alert system; calls for a co-ordinated flood warning system to take account of surface and river water; improved river maintenance, particularly along the River Bourne; improved maintenance of ditches, funding allocations for maintenance and capital scheme investment; implications for businesses and residents regarding insurance claims and premiums; the operation and

management of the flood storage area; planning development and the reassurance that the Borough Council consulted the EA as appropriate and followed national policy and guidelines in determining applications; improvements to the cleansing programme for drains; the operation of the Southern Water Services pumping station and the reassurance that at no time had the operation been any different to normal.

The EA reiterated that any improvement schemes needed to demonstrate value for money to secure appropriate funding from Government. However, every effort would be made to actively pursue funding opportunities and the Agency was working with Kent County Council to identify flood priorities.

The Leader of the Borough Council was pleased to announce that Tonbridge and Malling would work with the EA and local communities to establish a Flood Warden Scheme in Tonbridge. Reference was made to the successful scheme operating in East Peckham and the Borough Council was keen to learn from that example of best practice before launching anything borough wide.

In addition, the Borough Council would strongly lobby Government for improvements to flood protection measures and the flood storage area.

Sir John Stanley MP welcomed the Borough Council's commitment to the Flood Warden Scheme and outlined his priority actions for Tonbridge:

- Flood warning/alerts should be adapted to cover both river and surface water flooding. He remained unconvinced by the EA's argument that it would be too costly and this would be pressed with the Chairman of the EA. If the outcome remained unsatisfactory the question would be posed to the Minister for the Environment and then the Prime Minister.
- The height of the existing flood defence wall should be increased.
- The length of the flood defence wall should be increased.
- The EA would be pressed as to whether the existing controls at the Leigh Flood Storage Area were sophisticated enough to ensure water was let out sufficiently early.
- Urgent and immediate action to increase the capacity of the flood storage area and waiting until 2035 was not acceptable.

Finally, residents remained frustrated, disappointed and angry at the lack of effective communication, support, assistance and guidance offered during the flooding. The Chairman encouraged residents to participate in the Working Groups being arranged by the EA to identify key areas of improvement. Information regarding both the Working

Groups and Flood Warden Scheme would be available on the Borough Council's website for those residents wishing to express an interest to be involved.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and hoped that some progress had been made in addressing and acknowledging issues.

TF 14/3 MINUTES OF PUBLIC MEETING: HILDENBOROUGH - 4 FEBRUARY 2014

These were made available for collection at the end of the meeting.

TF 14/4 MINUTES OF PUBLIC MEETING: DANVERS ROAD RESIDENTS - 5 FEBRUARY 2014

These were made available for collection at the end of the meeting.

TF 14/5 RESPONSES ARISING FROM PUBLIC MEETINGS

These were made available for collection at the end of the meeting.

The meeting ended at 10.45 pm