

Much Wenlock Flood Forum

On Friday 4th December I chaired a meeting of the Much Wenlock Flood Forum in the Guildhall, Much Wenlock, to review the feasibility report commissioned by Shropshire Council into the summer floods of 2007 which had caused such devastation in the town.

I had originally established a Flood Forum for Much Wenlock in the months following the floods in 2007. This has provided a means of getting each tier of the then three local authorities, the Environment Agency, Severn Trent Water, locally elected representatives and interested bodies in the town, such as the Civic Society and Wenlockeye, around a table together to try to thrash out what could be done to minimise damage from flooding in the town in the future.

Our first meeting was held in January 2008 and the subsequent meeting that July agreed the need for a detailed report about the 2007 floods to be prepared, with as much engineering evidence as available to help diagnose pinch-points within the town's drainage system. Armed with this we could start to identify where improvements needed to be made.

The then Shropshire County Council agreed to commission a feasibility report and the engineering services department of Telford & Wrekin Council were appointed to undertake the report, given their particular expertise in flooding.

It took nearly 18 months to produce this report, with a great deal of input from many people in the town. Special mention should be made of the efforts of John Yeats, Chris Bowden and Paul Weeden whose detailed recording of flood events as they happened, and subsequent diligence in speaking to affected households and later analysis of the catchment have been invaluable.

Chris Butler, author of the report, at last December's meeting took the Forum through his report. This comprised a detailed analysis of the principal watercourses running into the Farley River through the town of Much Wenlock; a description of the apparent weak spots in the drainage system or capacity constraints; and a set of recommendations as to what further work needed to be done in order to bring forward a set of specific remedial actions.

The analysis took into account each of the six main identified sections of watercourse where the problems had occurred. These were Stretton Road, Much Wenlock Town Culvert, Sytche Lane, Bourton Road, Walton Hills and Farley Brook areas. For each of these sections, as well as some other areas which flooded such as Hunters Gate, a detailed map had been prepared, identifying any known blockages, constrictions of drainage, as well as mitigating or exacerbating features.

Recommendations were made as to those places within each section which required further detailed work before solutions could be identified.

Several positive steps were put forward to the Forum. In summary:

- Shropshire Council's Head of Technical Services, Ron Buzzacott agreed to act as the co-ordinator of other bodies to lead on progressing the recommendations coming out of the feasibility report.
- Shropshire Council has submitted an application for funding to DEFRA for development of a Surface Water Management Plan, seeking £100,000 of grant to take forward the recommendations for further work from the feasibility report. I have written to Hilary Benn MP, Secretary of State for DEFRA to endorse this application.

- Much Wenlock Town Council submitted its Flood Management Manifesto. Several of the important points it raises had been taken up within the Forum and were being acted upon.
- The Environment Agency representative confirmed that the Farley River and main Town Culvert had been designated a Main River, which gives them certain powers in law.
- Shropshire Council's Southern Area Manager for Development Management, Rob Mills, confirmed that the areas of the town prone to flooding are eligible to be considered within planning policy PPS25. This national planning statement requires planning applications to include, as part of their application, a drainage mitigation scheme to ensure any development does not aggravate the flows of surface water through the town.
- Rob Mills also confirmed that Shropshire Council could resolve to issue a guidance note to developers in relation to drainage mitigation for planning applications in Much Wenlock and this should be raised within the South Shropshire Planning Committee.
- I agreed to contact Severn Trent Water, unfortunately not represented at the December meeting, to request a survey of the effluent pipes from the sewage treatment plant and that any shortcomings found should be remedied.
- The Environment Agency also agreed to offer its support and assistance to riparian owners down Farley Brook to help with any mitigation plans to expand holding pools or remove obstacles to the flow of water down lower stretches of the brook.

We agreed that the best way to bring everyone in Much Wenlock up to date with the points raised in the report would be to hold a Flood Fair in Much Wenlock in February. The National Flood Awareness Forum, each of the agencies and local authorities with an interest in water management in Much Wenlock, as well as companies offering flood alleviation services, have all been invited to attend.

This Flood Fair has now been arranged for Saturday 27th February and is being held in William Brooks School from 12 noon until 5pm. Everyone interested in preventing further flooding in the town is encouraged to drop in at some point during the day. Further information will be available from Much Wenlock Town Council.

There remains much work to be done, but overall this Flood Forum was a positive step forward in seeking to resolve Much Wenlock's surface water drainage problems, which caused such misery to many with the exceptional rains of 3 years ago.

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