West Itchenor Parish Council

Minutes of a public meeting on the Itchenor Rife Flood Risk held on 27th October 2017 in Itchenor Memorial Hall.

Present:	Parish Council	Mr J Dunn, Mr C Mead-Briggs, Mr A Spencer, Mrs S Taylor
	Residents	28 Residents
	Guests	Mr P Montyn (WSCC - Councillor) Ms J Reeve (Manhood Wildlife Officer) Ms C Francis (Environment Agency) Mr K Macknay (WSCC – Flood Risk Management)

Cllr Dunn welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that Mr Macknay and Ms Francis would update residents on issues relating to the watercourses and sea defences.

Mr Kevin MckNay (WSCC – Flood Risk Management)

Mr Macknay explained that the County Council's area of responsibility covered ground water, surface water and ordinary watercourses. The Environment Agency's responsibility covered main rivers and coastal waters.

Mr Macknay referred to maps showing 1 in 30 year and 1 in 100 year flooding risks. The 1 in 100 map shows effectively what happens if the sea wall was not in place.

Itchenor has not seen any coastal flooding but there has been surface water flooding. In the main this has been due to blocked ditches and blocked watercourses.
WSCC is now responsible for these issues and works closely with CDC. Properties that have ditches along the boundary are likely to be riparian owners and in the first instance issues to do with maintenance of these ditches would be with CDC. CDC would discuss what maintenance needs to be done, encouraging people to do what is necessary. If riparian owners take no action on maintenance, then WSCC gets involved with enforcement.
Prior to April 2017, Itchenor use to be within the Internal Drainage Board (IDB) area. The IDB used to look after the rife from the pond to the outfall. Since the abolition of the IDB in April 2017 the owners of the adjoining properties are now responsible for this maintenance. Mr Macknay suggested residents work together either by organising working parties or by contributing to the cost of contractors to undertake the necessary maintenance work.

Ms Claire Francis (Environment Agency)

Ms Francis talked about work around the sea wall. Itchenor occupies a relatively sheltered location in harbour and the sea wall is not prone to wave overtopping or tidal surges. The existing sea wall offers no more than 1 in 20 standard protection, with a 5% chance of something happening. Predicted tide level in 2115 is 4.4m above ordnance datum.

The EA has responsibility for maintaining the sea wall and outfall. This is subject to funding in any given year. Currently there is no economic justification for making improvements.

11 properties are directly at risk of flooding if the sea wall breaches. The cost benefit ratio of defending these properties is not justifiable. The predicted tide level in 100 years is 1.4m higher than the average height of sea wall.

Ms Francis spoke about Tidelocking – where there is a spring tide and a fluvial event – water backs up can't get out fast enough. Much of the area around the rife is a natural flood plain where the water sits until it can drain out through the outfall. There is less than a metre gradient from the pond to the outfall. The EA has looked at the size of the outfall and believes that increasing the size is unlikely to increase flow of water.

What would help shift water is a pumping station but this is a significant investment and requires ongoing maintenance. The cost would be around £1m and there would be ongoing challenges as the surrounding land is so flat.

Flood risk will remain or get worse. The EA could provide a bund to protect properties most at risk. A 0.5m high earth embankment –would change the stats to 1 in 30. It is estimated the cost would be £150/200K to do this. The EA cannot justify the expenditure to put in measures to combat tidal flooding.

Cllr Jim Dunn (West Itchenor Parish Council)

The Parish Council has identified surface water as an ongoing issue. Operation Watershed funding has been received to carry out some work. Some ditches have been opened up to improve flow of water. The Parish Council has lowered the level of the pond and weir gate. That makes the pond capable of storing water. Currently we are waiting for a quote to dredge the pond. Work is also planned to open up some of the culverts in the area.

New thinking is necessary as a result of the change in responsibility. Cllr Dunn raised the question - is it worth doing secondary protection? No-one knows what the situation may be in 50 years. The Parish Council wanted to make residents aware of the risks and the situation.

Questions and comments were then invited.
(Q – Question, A – Answer, C – Comment)

Q. How much higher are sea levels now than 50 years ago.
A. The EA don't know, studies are being done but there is no doubt that the tidal top will increase as it is already happening.

Q. Is predicted rise in tidal heights tied in with what's happening in Holland.
A. Yes – climate change is happening across the world.

Q. On the outfall, if there was another pipe then would this not make a difference?
A. Yes, there is a need to increase ability to flow out and this would make an impact on flow.

Q. How much sludge is in the pond, how much deeper will it go.
A. As an attenuation measure, it has already been lowered 200mm. But there is a further 40m^3 to come out. More important is how much should come out of the rife. Cllr Dunn has received a survey from the 70's that has not been studied yet.

Q. Do people feel the risk is enough that they want to pay for another study to be done. The EA figures are quite generic. Do residents wait for an event to happen, or put in some effort to get more detail to see what may happen.
A. There is concern about what may happen but what would a more detailed study give. Would this funding be better spent on clearing the rife.

A. The Risk is modelled and scenario based. Until something happens then the EA can't calibrate scenarios properly.

C. Last week there was a predicted 5.3m tide in reality it was higher than this. If the prediction is 1m more in 100 years we are already half way there this winter.

Q. What happens to wildlife when you start digging the rife.
A. 40 years ago the EA used to dig the rife, problems are caused by not digging because of the wildlife. Now reed rot exists and the rife is level with residents gardens.

C. There was concern about the number of properties that will be flooded if the map shows what happens without a sea wall given that prediction is 1.4m above the existing sea wall. A bund won't remove flood risk but will give extra protection. To remove flood risk completely the wall height needs increasing.
In the past the rife was dredged out but this doesn't happen anymore. There was concern that it was a significant enough problem for the EA to dredge the rife, but there is no funding now to do this.

C. When the responsibilities of the IDB were transferred to WSCC it was done without any extra funding. Land owners used to pay a precept to the IDB but this doesn't happen now. Responsibility is back to the land owners.

C. 40 years ago there were no water voles in the rife now there are. The habitats protected as population of water voles is much smaller.

Q. Should we petition the County Council to get funding back so that work can be done.

C. To designate the rife as a main river it needs a benefit cost ratio 8 to 1. In Itchenor the cost benefit ratio is 1 to 4, so it is not cost effective to have main river designation.

C. Other parishes have the same issues and concerns. Some are proposing to charge within the precept so that the Parish Council can take on the responsibility.

Q. If projects were jointly funded would this change the cost benefit ratio.
A. Yes the EA would go back to review this. It is all down to the numbers.

Q. How much would it cost to clear out rife on an annual basis ?
A. Weed cutting currently costs several thousand pounds depending on the extent of the clearance.
A. The costly part is the removal of waste? If this dumped on peoples gardens then it would be less expensive.

Q. The Parish Council has been discussing the issues. Do residents want the Parish Council to manage the rife and draw from you to pay a contractor. Would this be of interest?
A. Yes.
Q. Are residents prepared to help?
A. No response

C. The Pond and the rife are the main drainage for the whole of the village. Any solution needs to involve the whole of the village and not just those immediately affected.

C. Concern was expressed that the outfall was not fit for purpose, the village used not to flood this badly and this has happened since the sea flap was changed.
C. The EA has assessed that the sea flap is functioning correctly. It needs real-time information. EA contact details to be provided.
C. Currently the outfall is only open 2 hours either side of low water. 40 years ago it was 3 hours either side.

Residents were advised that thought needs to be given to the information provided at this meeting. The Parish Council may consider undertaking work to aid the normal flow of the rife if requested to do so by residents. The other consideration is whether anything needs to be done to the sea wall. In either case, nothing is going to happen unless residents make it happen. The first thing would be to get engineers to look at where the first risk is and what can be done.

Q. Would it help if people volunteer to take series of photos recording the time/date.
A. Yes this would be helpful.

Q. Is there some means of measuring when flap is open and closed.
A. No-one records water heights.
C. A simple hawkeye would be a cheap means of measuring the height of the water.
A. Ms Francis agreed to look at this.

C. It may be that the Parish Council should consider taking responsibility to undergo maintenance on the rife and to raise the funds through the Precept. The initial costs may be expensive but after the first year costs should level out. It was noted that both Earnley and West Wittering Parish Councils were doing this

Q. Is it the feeling of the meeting that the precept is used to raise funds.
A. By a show of hands this seems to be the case.

C. If the worst case scenario happens that the road will be washed away so will affect more than just residents within the village.

C. Sea levels are rising now, it is unlikely to be as long as 100 years and could be as soon as 30 years. Low pressure also affects the sea height. There is a need now to look at solutions including a review of the whole flood risk surrounding the sea wall. A study is likely to cost around £100K.
Q. What happens if Southern Water sewerage issues continue.
A. The EA looks also at funding from Southern Water to protect infrastructure.

C. The point about including funding in the council tax is not so hard if it is known that this would affect property. This would be a common sense thing to do.

C. A proposal was made to put in matched funding with the EA to consider what may be done. The prospect is that this would take around 12 months as an EA led project.

C. Surface water is also a huge problem and has to be picked up at same time. The question is whether residents want to look ahead.

C. The majority of residents present wanted to clear the ditch. There was concern that after spending money on research then there would still be no money from the EA to do anything.

C. Residents were reminded about what happened at the Hinge (East Head) where officials said they were not going to defend it. Significant donors went to the Conservancy with offers of funding help and in the end officials changed their view.

C. The first overtopping of sea wall will be gentle but this may change peoples mindset.

Q. The EA must be looking at the bigger picture of the harbour as a whole and across the country?
A. Yes, but the EA looks at the cost benefit ratio on each individual area. It doesn't look at places of greatest risk it looks at cost benefit ratio first. Areas where there is the biggest benefit get the best funding.

C. A case study of Southbourne was highlighted where 17 properties historically flooded from the river. An ordinary watercourse ran across the front of properties and the main river at the back. Properties were being flooded from the main river at the back. Over the last 5 years residents have raised funding towards the £300K, spent to defend those properties. Several phases were undertaken and about £200K was raised by the community and other external sources.

Cllr Dunn reported that he would take this information back to the Parish Council in November. If residents are in favour then it would raise funding through the Precept and employ a contractor to undertake the necessary dredging work.

C. It was commented that it may be pointless doing the dredging if the issues with the outfall flap were not addressed. This required longer term investigation and some investment.

Ms Francis agreed to take the message back to the EA that more accurate measuring was necessary.

Jane Reeve commented that there were restrictions on how often a bucket should go in a ditch. Most contractors are aware of the protections for the wildlife. Annual dredging will destabilise the rife. Work needs to be done with thought and she would have discussions with the EA.

Cllr Dunn thanked everyone for attending the meeting.
The meeting finished at 7.30pm