



Watton Town Council

WATTON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN DRAINAGE WORKING GROUP

Report for the Town Meeting on 17 April 2018 Work from October 2017 to the present

Background

The Group was formed at the first public meeting of the Neighbourhood Plan on 20th July 2017 when a resident expressed great distress over the surcharging of the sewer in Thetford Road. From then until October 2017 Jo Jacklin was Chairperson with members Trevor Ancelet, George Anderson-Williams, Bob Dore, Cllr Keith Gilbert, Alan Nichols and Jamie Wittridge.

When Jo stood down as Chairperson due to pressure of work, Bob Dore took over. Several members were unable to attend due to work pressures and family and health concerns so from October 2017 the members have been Trevor Ancelet, Nick Creek (Saham Toney Parish Councillor), Cllr Keith Gilbert, Alan Nichols and Liz Whitcher. We decided to involve Nick Creek because Watton and Saham Toney share the same problems.

Bob Dore stood down as Chairperson in early February this year to spend more time with his wife and to concentrate on his music but was still a resource to the Group with his invaluable knowledge of drainage as a retired Public Health Engineer. The Group were very sad when Bob died suddenly in late March and miss him for his knowledge and drive. Trevor Ancelet was elected Chairperson.

Introduction

Bob Dore was convinced that the Group had to gather hard evidence of the problems with surface water flooding and with the sewer system in the town in order to show the various authorities responsible that the Group knew what it was doing. He devised a questionnaire which the Group have been delivering to all homes in streets known to have been affected by the flooding after the storm of 23 June 2016. He also had the Group researching whatever legislation, guidance and regulations were relevant. Based on the lack of response from any of the three authorities to letters, emails and phone calls from Bob, the Group decided that they had to use the local government system to get any response from them.

Summary of work from October to the present

1. Based on photos taken on 23 June 2016, using anecdotal evidence from residents, our own observations and facts from reports, the Group compiled a

preliminary report with recommendations which was presented to the Town Council at its meeting on 28 November 2017. A copy of this report is available for reading at the Council offices.

2. The recommendations asked the Town Council to send a copy of the report to the relevant officers at Breckland District Council, Norfolk County Council and Anglian Water and asking them to meet with the Group.
3. In December 2017, the Town Council received a Flood Investigation Report from the County Council. Under government legislation, the County Council are known as the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) and have a duty to investigate significant flooding from any source. The Council was given 14 days to respond and wrote to say that was insufficient time and they would respond as soon as possible. The Flood Investigation Report can be accessed at the following link on the internet <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/rubbish-recycling-and-planning/flood-and-water-management/flood-investigations> Scroll down to the bottom of the page and click on Watton. A paper copy is available for reading at the Council offices.
4. In January 2018, the Drainage Group wrote a response for the Town Council to agree which they did at their meeting on 13 February 2018. The response was robust about the fact that it had taken 18 months for the report to appear and challenged the basis of the proposed measures the County would take. This response is available to read at the Council offices.
5. Officers from the three authorities do not respond to either the Town Council or us as a Group constituted properly as a Working Group of the Neighbourhood Plan which they should all recognise.
6. Bob was tireless in his pursuit of them all by email, letter and phone. Before his untimely death he had managed to get a response from all three agreeing to meet with the Group.
7. The residents of Watton who received one of the Group's questionnaires have done a magnificent job. They not only ticked the boxes, they wrote valuable commentary. By 23 March, 118 had been returned.
8. Using Social Media, the Group now have access to the weather records of three local people – one in Dereham Road, one in Saham Toney and one in Little Cressingham. This information is crucial because summer storms in particular are highly localised and we found quite a difference in the amounts of rainfall recorded by these 3 in both 2009 and 2016. The Group also know that sustained moderately heavy rain over a number of days as occurred at Easter this year can cause flooding problems.
9. On 26 March, Cllr Gilbert, Alan Nichols and Liz Whitcher met with Alex Chrusciak, Director of Planning and Building Control at Breckland Council. They gave him a summary of those properties flooded either internally, externally or both. That was a useful meeting where that summary put him in the picture about the scale of the problem and he informed us of the response his planning officers could make. The main thing they can do is ensure that all new developments use Sustainable Drainage Systems which have to demonstrate that they will not cause flooding on the development or the surrounding area.
10. On 5 April, Trevor Ancelet, Keith Gilbert, Alan Nichols and Liz Whitcher had a two hour meeting with three officers at Anglian Water. A report had been written based on the 118 questionnaires returned which included facts about

the number of properties flooded and also quotes from residents. A copy of this is available to read at the Council offices.

11. This was a constructive meeting and they gave us chapter and verse about the causes of problems with the foul sewers. The main problem is people putting unflushable items down the toilet and fat down the sink. There is a major education exercise to be done which we will work on together.
12. The Group also now know that a main cause of surface water flooding is watercourses and ditches which have either not been maintained or have been filled in. We will start identifying land owners and work with them to persuade them to undertake their responsibilities hopefully without having to resort to the County Council's enforcement powers.
13. On 5 April the Group sent a letter to all councillors on the Breckland Planning Committee about their concerns about the Abel development off Town Green Road and the risk of surface water flooding because of assumptions made by the developer's engineering consultants. They also expressed concern about the capacity of the foul sewers to accommodate effluent from another 98 homes. The meeting with Anglian Water was useful in helping to put our concerns about the foul sewer capacity into context.
14. On 9 April Liz Whitcher and Cllr Keith Gilbert (as Watton Town Cllr and Breckland District Cllr) spoke at the Planning Committee updating members on their meeting with Anglian Water and registering the concerns still to be addressed.

Future Work

1. The Group plan to finish delivering the questionnaires to those streets not yet targeted ie Harvey Street and those north of it. They will then be able to write a more complete report on the actual flooding in June 2016. We have gathered valuable information about the storm on 15 June 2009. Some residents have flagged up other years too.
2. The Group plan to arrange a meeting with Mark Ogden at the County Council to discuss a more strategic plan for dealing with the risk of surface water flooding. This will include involving his Highways colleagues.
3. The Group will work with the County Council and Anglian Water to identify cost effective measures to mitigate the flooding and to access sources of funding.

Trevor Ancelet (Chairperson)
Nick Creek (Saham Toney Parish Councillor)
Town and District Councillor Keith Gilbert
Alan Nichols
Liz Whitcher