

Report from Drainage Group for Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group Meeting on 24 September 2018

Since the last Steering Group meeting on 29 June, the Drainage Group have the following to report:

- 1. Surface water ditch survey:** We walked the ditches from Merton Road to Cranswick including the Bridle Path. We were able to see that there are two different linked ditches in that area. The one that runs through Cranswick is huge and will carry an enormous volume of water. In a storm, it is clear that the volume would overwhelm the culvert under the road even if all is clear to run. So works to mitigate that may need to be a priority when any funding comes through (see paragraph 3 below).
- 2. Keep It Clean Campaign:** On 9 July, the Group met with Chris Wray, Anglian Water, who updated us on initiatives in the pipeline such as the Keep It Clean Campaign. In the week beginning 2 August, officers from AW visited 85 properties in Watton who most frequently phone them about blocked sewers. The plan is to educate them about not putting unflushables down the toilet. On 16 September, 3 officers had a stall at the Carnival. They talked to people and handed out free gifts including toilet paper, strainers for the sink, scrapers for taking fat off dishes/pans etc. They also had a storyteller who told a story she has made up about blockage in the sewers caused by wet wipes etc. She did this 4 times. She had puppets and other equipment to illustrate the story. I listened in and it is very cleverly done and entertaining. The summary message for the children was the 3 Ps ie the only things going down the toilet are pee, paper and poo. The plan is that she will visit the schools sometime this term. That initiative involves AW's Education Dept.
- 3. County Council Lead Local Flood Authority:** On 26 July, the Group met with Mark Ogden and two of his colleagues at County Hall. After going through his Flood Investigation Report and giving them the benefit of our local knowledge, he revealed that they had applied for a grant to the Environment Agency to do mitigation works in Watton and Saham Toney as outlined in his report. When asked why this had not been communicated to the Town Council or the Group, he said they did not want to raise people's hopes just to have them dashed if no grant was forthcoming!! One of his colleagues, Nathan Harris, is the one who looks at the drainage ditches. The other female colleague whose name I forget, designs mitigation measures such as dams, holding tanks and encourages farmers to think how they can farm their land to help mitigate flooding. We asked about Highways drainage and they put us in touch with the relevant officer (see paragraph 4 below).

In the course of looking at maps of drains on computer, there appeared one in black and white dashes from the 1920s and they had no idea what that was. After the meeting I realised that the route of the drain which ran along Harvey Street and one part on the High Street, reminded me of something Martin Anscombe

had told me at the RAF baton event about underground springs. I got his phone number from Keith and phoned him and he told me that there are 3 springs from Caudlesprings (to the north east of Watton) which run beneath Harvey Street, the north of the High Street and the South of the High Street. He lives in Harvey Street and has a well in his garden as does another house in the street. He told me that in the storm of 2016, the water rose to within 5 feet of the top of the well which is 30 feet deep! So I think the fountain that Jane Fountain is proposing to reinstate in the High Street could well be connected to this underground spring. I was also at the cemetery recently and the old pump there is on the same line as Harvey Street and could well be the same spring. I have told Mark Ogden this and it will be interesting to see what more can be discovered.

4. Highways Drainage. On 30 August, Ben Rayner, County Council Highways Engineer came to Watton and we walked some of the problem areas. We started in Thetford Road and he was able to show us maps of where the drains run and this is critical for the proposed development on the east side of Thetford Road. The drainage ditch that runs through the centre of the field drains surface water from as far away as Griston Road as well as the Priors Road Estate. The ditch at the south of the field where there is always flooding goes under the road to a field on the other side and the culvert there is completely blocked which is why it floods the road. We need to tackle the landowner about that. I plan to make a representation on the planning application in my capacity as Chair of the Drainage Group if the Steering Group think this is appropriate.

We next went to Cranswick and Steve Langham the Health and Safety Manager was on the look out for us as I had alerted him that Ben was coming. The Highways drain that discharges at the bridge there comes from just near the Bridle Path. Ben was very clear that they cannot enlarge the culvert under the road because they work to standards which it meets and they can't plan for storms like those in 2009 and 2016. He understood the frustration of that and he and Steve had a robust exchange of views! While at the Wayland Show, Alan Nichols had looked at the ditch north of that culvert where it runs into the Watton Brook and said it was very overgrown and there were two bridges over it. We need to look at that in the winter when the plant growth has died down.

We then walked the Bridle Path and saw some of the ditch system there. There is a drainage system put in some years ago by the Bowes family when they owned the Cranswick site and we are to ask Steve for the plans for that so we can see what is involved.

We went to Saham Toney and Nick gave Ben the benefit of his local knowledge about the issues there.

Finally we looked at the Highways drainage in Watton Green which is complicated. Ben said he would ask his technicians who can detect where water is under the ground to map the drains in both Saham Toney and Watton Green. Then we can meet up again.

- 5. New Junction at the Abel Development.** He also indicated that he could raise with the Highways engineer who designed the new junction for the Abel development the many problems it causes. So we hope some alterations may be possible to that.
- 6. Affiliation to the National Flood Forum:** Having received the form for completion, it is clear that the Drainage Group are the appropriate body to join. So I have completed it and attach a copy for information. It does require us to name our local authority and so the Town Council is there as another contact point.
- 7. Future Work:** As the County have applied for a grant, the Group decided we did not have to push on so hard with our own research and so we have had September off because all of us were busy with other things.

As Chairman I plan that we will still deliver the questionnaires to all the streets affected by flooding so that we have the full picture and because our local knowledge is vital. We should aim to get all these out by the end of October. We will also continue walking the ditches and it will be easier to see their state when they are not so overgrown.

Liz Whitcher
Chairman
Drainage Working Group
21 September 2018