

Flooding update

Following the Cotswold residents' flood meeting on the 5th March, I will now provide an update including information we have received from the various stakeholders and agencies and a selection of answers we have received to questions from constituents if you are interested.

Now the summer months are upon us we expect tangible progress to be made with all the agencies working together. It is vital that if we have heavy rainfall next winter the Cotswolds is properly prepared, and we do not have a repeat of last winter. The winters do appear to be getting consistently wetter, so this seems to be a problem which is not going to go away which makes it all the more urgent of an issue.

I also plan to visit areas to see for myself what work has been carried out and where more needs to be done before the next flood meeting in October so I have a real sense and evidence of what progress has been achieved or not.

We will be providing another newsletter in a few weeks where we will ask the agencies and stakeholders for another progress report.

If you would like any further information or if you have any questions, please email me at cliftonbrowng@parliament.uk

Highways update from Bob Skillern, Area Highways Manager (East), Highways Commissioning, Gloucestershire County Council:

'The Highway network is the most valuable asset that the County Council manages, maintains and providing a safe, resilient, functioning network is at the core of the Council's responsibility as a Highway Authority. A major part of this responsibility is the management of the Highway drainage network to ensure where practicable it operates at optimum capacity.

Throughout the year, but particularly during major adverse weather events such as the December storm, we investigate reports of Highway flooding and damaged or blocked Highway drains and take appropriate measures to get water off the Highway, alleviate or mitigate flooding as appropriate. Ahead of storm events such as December we increase the number of gangs and plant available on the network and if necessary suspend other Highway work to ensure we have the necessary resource to attend flooding issues as quickly as practically possible. The collaborative working with other agencies has ensured that during these events, where we could clear blockages to the Highway drainage system, we did have some success in prevent flooding. Unfortunately a number of roads and key transport routes were closed as a result of the flooding and some of these are outside of the direct control of Gloucestershire Highways, but every effort was made to reopen routes as quickly as possible when it was safe to do so.

Obviously, we have great sympathy to those residents who were flooded at Christmas and will continue our work with GCC colleagues and the other agencies to make improvements going forward. We have already collaborated on the Report for the December event and will build on the lessons learnt.

We will continue to cleanse our network of Highway gullies in line with our annual programme and carryout additional cleansing to known historic flooding locations. As well as jetting our drainage systems on a reactive basis as they are reported or found through inspection and carryout a bi-annual programme of verge grip (drainage channel) cleaning and cutting.'

Cirencester Town Council update:

'Cirencester Town Council continues to engage with the Environment Agency on ensuring our joint response in times of flooding is timely and effective; we have also listened to the concerns of the public in respect of the operation of the sluice gates. The Town Council is responsible for the operation of two out of the four sluices in Cirencester and has met informally with Friends of the Gumstool Brook and representatives of the Churn Catchment Flood Prevention Group. We remain committed to commissioning a review in to the memorandum of understanding for the sluice gate operation and it is hoped a draft report and recommendations will be available in the early summer.'

Answers to those questions with a specific Highway component from Bob Skillern:

Question: Who is responsible for clearing the drainage ditches that run along the A417 (Fairford Road) from the centre of Lechlade to The Wern roundabout?

These ditches are blocked/full of weeds and plants and will contribute to Lechlade flooding. When was the last time they were cleared and is there an ongoing plan to clear them?

Lechlade

In normal circumstances the ditches alongside a road are the maintenance responsibility of the adjacent landowner, they do not form part of the publicly maintainable Highway, unless they are solely for Highway use. There is some speculation that historically these ditches were maintained by the EA.

Question: I would appreciate a summary of current action plan and priorities.

I would also like to understand rapid response stance / plan and specific responsibilities (if any) to forecast weather events.

South Cerney

Gloucestershire County has experienced a number of flood events over recent years and these fit under two headings, either river or surface water flooding. Working closely with the Environmental Agency and other bodies in the county we have a good understanding of the impact of river levels on the county and the impact of intensive rain on surface water run off. Gloucestershire hold a number of action plans for the impact of flooding or heavy rain on the county and many of these are well tested after the events back in 2007, 2012, 2014, 2019 and 2020. These action plans are held in our Emergency Manual.

Question: Fairford Town Council would appreciate a long awaited update on these issues.

1) When are EA going to update the model underlying the flood warning map for Fairford, and also the long-term flood risk map, to take account of the flood alleviation scheme implemented by the EA in 2013 in response to the 2007 floods. Can you please give us a firm date by which this will be done?

2) Also we would like to know when EA are going to clear the obstructions in the River Coln at Fairford:

- a) The main river and side channels up to 800 metres downstream from Town Bridge (A417)
b) downstream of the meadow adjacent to Cleeve Wood downstream of the Thames
Water sewage works outfall
- 3) A multi agency solution is required at West End Gardens where a collapsed Victorian surface water drain causes surface to flood properties and their sewers. The only solution is to construct a new surface water drain and connect it to the watercourse towards the A417.
Fairford Town Council.

The possible construction of a new surface water drain at West End Gardens will be discussed by the Local Highway Manager at his next scheduled meeting with the Parish Council.

Question: Clearly the matter of the Flood incident in Siddington over 6 days during Christmas 2020 is the key concern. In particular why neither the Environment Agency nor Gloucester Highways had undertaken the necessary work to prevent this flood event, despite being requested in writing to do so by myself. With regard to the EA, I was in communication during 2019 and 2020 with Shaun Shackleford of the EA, as to the obstructions in the Churn river channel, which he said he would address. With regard to the blocked culvert at Siddington Mill bridge, this request was submitted to Gloucestershire Highways in February 2015 and Richard Gray of Glos Highways also emailed to say this would be dealt with..

Principally, if neither the EA nor Gloucestershire Highways can fulfil their obligations what else can be done to make sure this work is undertaken.

Siddington, Cirencester

Gloucestershire Highways are working with the Parish Council and Estate office to obtain a clear access to the culvert so that the necessary clearance work can be undertaken. As soon as access is available the cleansing work will commence.

Question: How can we get a coordinated approach to get actions taken? There seems to be highways, landowners, Thames Water, environment agency all involved but all pointing at each other to drive resolutions.

Siddington, Cirencester

A commitment has been made by the GCC drainage Engineer to facilitate more collaboration and arrange frequent meetings between the various agencies to ensure a consistent consolidated approach.

*Question: Drainage ditches in the area around Kempsford have now become brooks and streams. Even some of these are now brooks are now regularly over flowing (parts of Washpool Brook now has 2 sections) with their banks collapsing. Some work by Laurence King helped to alleviate these issues but these were carried out some 10 or more years ago. The problem is now a wider issue with other ditches, drains and streams regularly over flowing. **Are there plans or is there any financial assistance available to prevent this continuing?***

At present the gravel lakes, which are increasing in number and with more gravel extractions planned around Kempsford and RAF Fairford, are storing millions of gallons of water because of the lack of back fill materials and poor monitoring. These lakes are now home to large flocks of swans,

*geese and other wildfowl, not a good idea so close to an active Airfield. Flow and pooling of both ground and surface water has certainly changed as a result. The C124 now regularly floods in new areas as well as old as water cannot escape on its original path to the Thames. **As Infill is likely to be an issue for years to come and global warming is extremely likely to bring heavier and more prolonged rainfall, shouldn't we now be proactive and have a multi agency approach to address this issue before communities and aircraft flights are affected?** Far too often we address issues after the event. We should now be trying to plan for the future.*

*Every winter sections of Kempford have experienced flooding around the Parsonage, next to the Thames Water pumping station. Over the years the road there has suffered as a result and it is Kempford PC's belief that the ground water has affected the pump station as more and more houses have been affected with downstairs toilets, washing machines etc becoming unusable. This month alone, multiple households have been affected with issues have arisen on 3 occasions. **Shouldn't there now be a major appropriate upgrade of waste water pipes and pumping stations as well as regular scheduled Highways drain clearance in all communities rather than just reacting***
Kempford Parish Council

Scheduled gully cleansing is undertaken annually by Gloucestershire Highways in and around the village. Across the county we have nearly 130,000 gullies and kerb weirs. Traditionally these have been inspected (at least once every two years) and cleansed on a routine basis. Over the last 5 years we have been collecting data about their condition and location and have now moved to what we refer to as a 'risk-based approach' to gully cleaning. Effectively each gully is set its own risk level based on a scientific model using the data and flooding considerations.

Here are a further selection of responses to questions we have received:

Question: I would like to understand what the various local authorities and agencies are planning to do to mitigate the risk of flooding.

I am particularly interested in this as our home has a public right of way running through it, an extinguishment order was made by Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) and a small number of objections (four) were received from a neighbouring landowner. GCC are now disinclined to support the application which means that we are not able to build flood defences around our home without affecting the footpath.

Bledington

Peter Siret at GCC Response:

Bledington Parish council has recently set up a flood group that has done some great work in investigating the flooding Bledington experienced last year as well as developed some mitigation proposals. Gloucestershire County Council will work with the flood group and other authorities in progressing these proposals as far as reasonably practical. I recommend this gentleman gets in touch with the local flood group for progress on this work.

Question: How can we get a coordinated approach to get actions taken? There seems to be highways, landowners, Thames Water, Environment Agency all involved but all pointing at each other to drive resolutions.

Siddington Cirencester

Peter Siret at GCC response:

The agencies you mention have been working together over the past few years to try and understand the flood mechanisms in Cirencester, of which there are many and the interplay between them is complex. Experience has shown that the development of a local flood group (parish or town council level) can help bring relevant agencies together to discuss the specific issues that are most relevant to residents.

Question: 'Whilst I understand a lot of work was undertaken to clean out and repair the culverts in Moreton (in my case, specifically regarding East Street), can you confirm that these are regularly cleaned out and kept in a state of adequate repair; as required if they are to cope with any future flooding incident?'

Moreton In Marsh

Joe Baker GCC Highways Response:

'GCC Highways cleaning frequency of its drainage assets in the vicinity described in the question, is in the main every two years, this work is done normally in June and September.

The Area highways representative and I carried out a visual inspection on all our drainage apparatus in the vicinity of East St, Oxford St and A44/A429 junctions on the afternoon of 17th March and all appeared clear.

In addition the Lead Local Flood Authority does not own any culverts in Moreton in Marsh and therefore will not be able to provide information on maintenance regimes of any potential third party assets.'

Bob Skillern GCC Response:

All gullies in East Street from the service road to school drop directly into the double culvert. These are checked regularly and are currently working to capacity. The culvert in East Street underwent significant repair following the 2007 floods and remains in a good free flowing condition. Although culverts of this size are not regularly cleaned as they tend to be self-cleansing, they are monitored, and action take when required. The Culvert located in Queen Victoria Gardens under the A429 Fosseway, has a 2 yearly inspection carried out by GCC structures team.

Question: Why aren't any of the authorities taking responsibility for identifying the cause of the mains drainage problems and ensuring the appropriate measures are taken to address it.

Dominic Collyer Thames Water response:

The root causes of sewer surcharges are numerous and resolution of the issues complex, they require all stakeholders responsible for drainage in the catchment to work together to resolve them. As well as working alongside the relevant authorities, we have recently invested over 2 million pounds in sewer leak tight lining across several systems to remediate areas of groundwater infiltration ingress that is entering the foul sewers. These areas included Cirencester and Bourton on the Water.

While steps are being taken in the right direction, there is still more to do. We are working with the Environment Agency to create Groundwater Impacted System Management Plans (GISMPs). These plans will outline short, medium and long term measures to deal with groundwater ingress, and will be completed by the end of November 2021. More information can be found here: <https://www.thameswater.co.uk/about-us/regulation/drainage-plans>.

We will continue to collaborate and work with the Local Lead Flood Authorities (LLFA) and all other relevant bodies to identify and resolve the issues that we face.

Question: Does the legal authority exist to force property owners to rectify unlawful connections and, if it does, why isn't anything being done to enforce it

Dominic Collyer Thames Water response:

We do not have the power to rectify a misconnection, i.e. to disconnect and then reconnect to the correct sewer. Local authorities do have this power under Section 59 of the building regulations.