



WEST SOMERSET FLOOD GROUP

**Minutes of the Meeting held at Sampford Brett Village Hall,
on Wednesday 1st March starting at 2.00.pm.**

Present : Chair Brenda Maitland-Walker (Carhampton): Christine Dubery (Treasurer – Dulverton): Vice-Chair Ian Aldridge and Peter Payne (Williton): Mary Coles and Dave Sherman (Roadwater): Caroline Moore (Nettlecombe): Mel Mileham (Winsford): Brian Martin (Sampford Brett): Heather Wilson (Crowcombe) Craig Palmer (Minehead) Kate Adams (Monksilver) Mark Bolland (Luxborough)

Apologies: were received from John Bonar (Minehead)

Treasurer's Report

Christine said there was £83. 30 in the bank but she was aware that there were a few members who had not paid the 21/22 year's £5 contribution towards the website – i.e., Watchet, Nettlecombe and Porlock. The invoice for 22/23 is due to go out in April. Winsford handed payment 21/22 and 22/22 at the meeting, so the new balance will be £93. 30.

Brenda explained Porlock representatives had not attended any meetings last year but she hoped once the parish council was back up and running, they may wish to re-join the group. Craig Palmer said he knew a few people in Porlock and would speak to them to see if they were still interested in attending WSFG meetings.

Update from Members

Dulverton

Christine reported that Dulverton had to get their Flood Team out. They organised the preparation and deployment of over 200 gel bags. They were the yellow gel type, but she said that after use they went hard so it was impossible to empty them. She asked if anyone else had used anything better. They are ok if filled with tap water, but if the stream or flood water is used, they are considered to be contaminated, and this creates problem in disposal. Brenda said she would try to find out how these should be disposed of.

She also has problems with people who own second or holiday homes. She has a system where the owners can leave instructions about access, but they don't always reply to her emails asking if they wish to participate.

Minehead

Craig said there had been flooding problems along the Esplanade due to sand blocking the drains. The council had employed a contractor who had managed to clear them part way so they work better than before but there is still a problem with the pipework which apparently runs under the rock groynes.

The District council have now cleared the attenuation ponds and rhynes at Seaward Way under their responsibility as riparian owners, but the contractor had left all the rubbish including bicycles and shopping trolleys from the local supermarkets, some of which ended back in the rhynes. The Internal Drainage Board have also cleared the rhynes within their 'viewed rhynes boundary'.

A meeting has been arranged with Brenda on Tuesday 7th at 11am, to go around the various rhynes and watercourses, so the Town has a clearer idea of who has what responsibility.

Crowcombe

Heather was able to report they had no flood problems this time.

Williton

Peter reported some flooding along the Doniford Road mainly from overflowing ditches, but this subsided quickly. Brenda had forwarded an email to Ian regarding a possible £8k fund towards desilting in Williton, but Ian said it wasn't clear how or who would be responsible for organising this. Brenda said she would try to get more clarity about this at the Flood Board meeting on Thursday 2nd March.

There had been some flooding in January on A39 by the entrance to the site where 350 houses are planned so the road had to be closed. Also the lane from the A39 to Yard was flooded from surface water runoff from adjacent fields.

Ian showed some photos of works which had taken place at Doniford Beach which was within the SSSI. He was unhappy that the Planning officer was not prepared to take the matter up unless it was formally reported. Brenda said she thought this was something the District was responsible for as the Coastal Protection Authority, and she would raise this at the Flood Board meeting. Ian said he would forward the photos he had taken.

Sampford Brett

Brian said they had no flooding problems in January, only last August. The grant awarded to them has now been spent on items including storage shed, protective clothing, shovels, torches, wheelbarrow etc.

They have also set up a training session for volunteers for Friday 24th March starting at 10am. Please contact Brian if you wish to attend email - leoneandbrian@gmail.com. They have also been working with Gareth Varney of the Wessex EA to install 2 stream gauges in the village, although they will not be delivered before April. If any other members are interested in obtaining telemetry for their area they should contact Gareth.Varney@environment-agency.gov.uk

Winsford

On 7th February Mel and Brenda met with Chris Khan and Ian Hooper from the Devon Environment Agency.

Mel was able to explain and show them the various problems:

1. The Historic (listed) structures – low arched packhorse bridges with narrow bottlenecks which were caused by gravel and berms in the watercourse. Large woody debris and invasive species such as Hemlock Water Dropwort blocking the flow.
2. Riparian owners fear of carrying out maintenance duties often because they don't know what they are or aren't allowed to do in a river, and fear of being fined.
3. Careless disposal of garden waste and building of structures near to, or on the bank of a watercourse
4. Lack of machinery and skilled operatives and the cost.
5. Lack of knowledge of people who move to a National Park, and the planning constraints that apply.
6. Landowners felling trees, fencing waste being left on the floodplain hoping it will lift in the next flood and become 'someone else's problem'.
7. Grants difficult to come by. Government Environment Plan 2023 may help in some instances. – “Reward farmers for actions to reduce risks and impacts from floods, droughts and wildfires through our new future farming schemes”
[.https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/environmental-improvement-plan](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/environmental-improvement-plan)
8. Concern SCC lack of funding to carry out work on ordinary watercourses to perform their statutory duties. Mel said that over the last 20 years she had never seen them do any maintenance work on the Winn Brook. Priority always given to major projects in high population areas. Tendency to use other organisations like FWAG where, without landowner agreement nothing happens.
9. Possible projects like 'Slowing the Flow Natural Flood Management with leaky dams may help.
10. ? Funding from Somerset Rivers Authority (this will need a statutory body to bid for funding) Lack of clarity of who to report to put a bid forward.

It was acknowledged that there had been little or no communication between the Devon EA and SCC currently covering the area, and although the EA were constrained by staff shortages they agreed this should be a priority as the new Unitary comes into being.

The EA Officers offered to supply leaflets for the PC to distribute to Riparian Owners which the PC can deliver and discuss with residents. The Engagement Officer also offered to attend a 'social gathering' like the 'annual fete' so he can explain how and what riparian ownership entails.

Winsford PC have contacted their county and district representatives to ask if the new Unitary will be an officer/department that will be responsible for the statutory duties relating to water and flood management and if so, get their contact details. Also find out how the new LCNs will help.

Nettlecombe

Caroline said they had no flooding incidents to report.

Roadwater

Mary and Dave said they were resurrecting the Flood Response Group and were looking to include the Flood Plan with an Emergency Plan as they were aware there were other emergencies such as power and water cuts/leaks, which also needed to be planned for. Brenda said 'Emergency Plan' templates are available from the Somerset

Prepared website. Dave reported that the stream gauge at Begganhuish had achieved record heights.

Mary said it had become apparent that a number of residents were not sure how to install their flood boards, and some residents couldn't remember where they were stored. Members commented that it was important to check the seals on the flood boards as the seals didn't always work well after a length of time. They said they were also in the process of organising a training session with Tiffany, and she would let members know the place, time and date in case anyone wished to attend.

Monksilver

Kate reported the drains which were installed via SRA funding were clogged up as no maintenance had taken place since installation, and this meant one property was badly flooded. Kate was able to report the drains have now finally been cleared.

She said she would like to get telemetry installed ideally at Bird Hill. Mary said that Bird Hill have been mentioned when they met the EA. Williton said they would be interested in joining in with Monksilver as it would give them early warning of flooding from that source. It was suggested they contact E.A. - Gareth.Varney@environment-agency.gov.uk to see if something could be arranged.

Luxborough

Mark reported they had a few problems with blocked drains and asked who to contact within the Exmoor LCN pilot. Members in the Exmoor area said Sam Murrell is the Project Manager, and she can be contacted via the Portal. Tim Williams is now undertaking the lengthsman's work.

Carhampton

Brenda met Jo Oborn of FWAG on site to look at the small pond which had been built to hold surface flood water run-off from the fields above. JO was not entirely happy with the way it had been built, and said she would contact them again –

- The banks at the side were a little steep and needed to be consolidated with planting to stop the earth falling in.
- The pipe which was installed to take the run-off was too low, and needed to be sited at a height to allow silt to settle, so only water was able to flow through to the watercourse.

There was also a problem with the silt trap which was built by the footpath as this was silted and so water was backing up onto the path in heavy rainfalls. The footpath on the maintenance plan of the District Council, so concern was expressed about who should maintain this as it was installed when Highways did with flood works via a SRA funded project.

We also visited the site at the top of Park Lane where surface water from a number of fields and from the by-road higher up the road was ponding and had nowhere to go as the ditches at the side had been compromised and filled in when Wessex Water did work on the pipes from the reservoir. Jo said the issue was complex and although some of the ditches should be maintained by adjacent landowners there were areas where ownership was a problem.

A meeting has been arranged to take place on 14th March with Jonathan Doyle LLFA of SCC to look at these issues.

NOTE; Somerset Prepared has grant funding for up to £5,000 per community for equipment, e.g. spades, storage shed, torches, high vis jackets etc. If you wish to apply for Grant funding please contact tiffany – tiffany.tapper@environment-agency.gov.uk, and she will send you an application form.

Time, Date and Place of next meeting

The next meeting to be held at **Winsford Village Hall on Wednesday 24th May 2023 starting at 2pm.**

Brenda to contact Withypool, Exford, and Exton Parish Councils to invite them to the next meeting of the Group