



## WEST SOMERSET FLOOD GROUP

**Minutes of the Meeting held at The Carhampton Village Hall,  
on Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> January starting at 2.00.pm.**

**Present** : Chair Brenda Maitland-Walker (Carhampton): Christine Dubery (Treasurer – Dulverton): Mel Mileham (Winsford): Brian Martin (Sampford Brett): Polly and Julian Soltau (Withypool & Hawkridge) Sue Smith (Carhampton) Mary Coles and Dave Sherman (Roadwater) Caroline Moore (Nettlecombe) Mike Ellicott (Exford)

Also present Hugo Bandorssen who has just started work with FWAG

**Apologies for absence** were received from Ted Williams (Exton): and Heather Wilson (Crowcombe): and Ian Aldridge (Williton) who came to Carhampton, but went to the Recreation Ground building, and thought he had got the wrong day.

**Presentation from Bel Deering** Community Engagement Officer for Somerset Rivers Authority. She outlined the Role of the SRA and its updated Strategy. Bel said they were hoping to organise some Somerset Prepared Roadshows and run workshops on flooding via the Local Community Networks.

Presentation slides attached.

Members said they had difficulty in accessing the Somerset Prepared website and finding the Emergency Plan template and the form to apply to the small grants fund.

Forms for the Small Grants Fund. (attached to covering letter)

The link to Somerset Prepared emergency plan templates is:

<https://www.somersetprepared.org.uk/communities/>

For further help or information email Bel at: [bel.deering@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:bel.deering@somerset.gov.uk)>

### **Minutes of the last Meeting**

These having been circulated prior to the meeting, were duly agreed.

### **Treasurer's Report**

Christine Dubery reported she had now been able to change the Bank account to an on-line account, which was much easier than having to change an access password every 6 weeks. She confirmed the balance in the account is £127. 30.

Brenda explained to new members that the £5 annual membership fee was to fund the West Somerset Flood Group website. Some changes need to be undertaken to the website but Sondar Digital have said they normally include support contracts with all of our websites, but our normal hosting packages *start* at £302.40+VAT per year, whilst they are currently charging the flood group £36 per year.

The vastly reduced rate means Sondar Digital can host the site but are unable to allocate team resources to updating it without charging for that time. He asked if anyone within the group was able to make changes. Dave Sherman agreed to see if he could do this and Brenda said she would send him the contact details so that Rob Swan at Sonder Digital could give him access..

### **Update from members**

The presentation had taken up much of the afternoon and some members had to leave so it was agreed they would send any updates after the meeting, and they would be included in the Minutes.

### **Winsford -Mel Mileham**

We got away with no flooding in the village or surrounding flood plain from the storms / rainfall this winter so far. The monitoring at the Exford station provides us with a pretty good idea when the Exe is going to top and as long as residents have signed up and understand the flood alert, flood warning or severe flood warning designations, they should be able to ameliorate damage to their property or danger to life.

Bel Deering SRA Engagement Officer's presentation was interesting and we await her feedback as to how to bid for projects now the pathway via West Somerset Flood Board no longer exists. Below is a perfect example of where the SRA could grant funding for river clearance.

Regrettably, despite Winsford PC and the EA efforts to engage with residents there are still many riparian owners who ignore warnings and have no intention of removing trees and debris from their stretch of river. The Exe is once again at crisis point because of landowners upstream of the village refusing to carry out their legal responsibilities. Now with the cuts from Somerset Unitary Council for the next year, I have no idea what will happen when these trees and debris move downstream, crash into and block bridges from Larcombe Foot to the parish boundary at Edbrooke.

Despite previous surveying by FWAG, there is still no sign of landowners engaging to stop run-off from the surrounding hills and springs or attempting to 'slow the flow' of Winn Brook.

### **Crowcombe**

Heather was unable to attend the meeting but sent the following report:

A pond has been dug out adjacent to the railway line on the opposite side to Watermead Farm. The land is encircled by Water Lane, Leigh Mill Lane, WSR track and the road from Heddon Oak to Leigh Crossing. The pond was dug without any planning permission or consultation. It is understood the pond is fed by a stream or just-run-off from the field. The land owner is Ms Pauline Hancock. A planning application (3/07/23/007) was submitted and refused, and the Parish Council is waiting to hear whether there has been an appeal or re-submission of a planning application. An enforcement notice has been erected on the site.

### **Dulverton – Christine Dubery**

Christine asked Bel if there was any possibility of getting some flood boards as part of Grant Funding, as some residents cannot afford the cost, but it would save Flood Group and parish/town volunteers if those properties had them installed. It would also save the cost of sandbags and of disposing them. If they are not part of the equipment parishes and towns can apply for, she wondered whether the Council could consider adding them in special circumstances, in addition to equipment already listed on the grant aid fund.

### **Exford**

Mike said Exford had problems getting the EA (Exeter) to agree to Somerset Highways clearing under the bridge, or to the removal of a tree which lodged against it. It was not made clear why consent was refused.

### **Withypool & Hawkridge - Polly Soltau**

Polly said the Parish Council had experienced difficulties in obtaining a template for an Emergency plan and Application form for the small grants. It was agreed Bel Deering would send link for inclusion in the draft Minutes.

### **Sampford Brett - Brian Martin**

The two telemetry gauges in the stream by the main street are now fully operational and send text and email alerts to the flood warden (Brian) and the chair of the parish council, triggered when designated stream water levels are reached - there are 3 or 4 levels set for each gauge.

#### 1. Flash flood on 17th September, 2023:

Over a period of about 3 hours in the morning, some 72mm (2.8 inches) of rain fell, and the upstream telemetry gauge outside Sampford House recorded a 0.5 meter rise in the stream level.

Rivers of muddy water came down the hill on the Capton road to the junction outside Sampford House and down the road from Manor Farm to the same junction. The turnout by flood response volunteers was excellent.

The equipment bought by the grant fund was put to use, including using all 40 sandless sandbags. No significant water entered the vulnerable properties. Most of the vulnerable properties have now put in measures to be more resilient to such flash flood events.

Somerset Council should be commended for responding to a call to clean up the road, which they did within 24 hours. Of the 'lessons learned' itemised in the report, the key ones are:

- i) A second, larger dirty water pump should be purchased, along with large diameter (32mm) hoses to expel the dirty water.
- ii) Funds should be sought to purchase replacement sandless sand bags - although we have four that the sandless sandbags are reusable for a few months

Both of these have now been achieved thanks to a grant fund from the Sampford Brett Activities Group, with a contribution from the parish council.

**Note: all sandbags are more effective when used with tarpaulins underneath and behind to act as a full seal in a doorway.**

## 2. Flash flood on 13th October, 2023:

Overnight rain again caused muddy water to flow down the hill on the Capton road to the junction outside Sampford House. There was no muddy flow anywhere else and it wasn't a threat to properties. This was cleared up, but then in the afternoon the downstream gauge registered a sudden rise even though the rain had stopped hours before - I thought this was strange, but on taking a look I saw what had happened. Surface water had built up in the field on the west of the Capton road a couple of hundred meters up the road from the junction (which had just harvested some of the potato crop). This then burst through the bank on the corner of the field and a lot of muddy water flowed down to the junction, depositing even more mud than had been cleared up in the morning. The farmer landowner helped clean up the road with a tractor, and flood response volunteers turned out quickly to assist following the WhatsApp group alert.

## **Carhampton – Brenda Maitland-Walker**

### Flooding 17<sup>th</sup> September 2023

A number of properties flooded, some caused by the wave action of vehicles driving too fast through the flood water. The A39 was closed for a short time while volunteers cleared blocked drains and gullies (some of which had tarmac in them left from when the road was re-surfaced). There were queues of backed-up traffic from the Minehead end because people were trying to get home as Butlins had flooded so holiday makers had to leave their accommodation. The problem made worse by vehicles also trying to exit the B3191 because the Caravan Parks at Blue Anchor were also being evacuated.

Two attenuation ponds recently installed on a new housing development off Withycombe lane overtopped creating further flood water run-off into the village and onto the highway.

The Area 13 LCN organised two Flood Drop-in meetings one of which was held in Carhampton and the other in Minehead, where people could come to get advice from statutory consultees on flooding, insurance, etc. The Local Lead Flood Authority have confirmed that Carhampton, Withycombe and Minehead all met the threshold and are subject to a Section 19 Investigation.

**Next Meeting to be the Annual General Meeting of the Group** and election of Chair: Vice Chair: Secretary: and Treasurer.

**Time Date and Place of next meeting –** to be held on 24<sup>th</sup> April at Roadwater Village Hall starting at 2pm.