

Report to P&E Committee 28th October 2014

Report No. 2

Flood Relief Works at the Town Bridge and the Meads

1. Purpose of Report

To update the Committee on the status of flood relief works at the Town Bridge and Cuckingstool and St Aldhelm's Mead

2. Flood relief works at the Town Bridge

2.1 Following the extensive flooding of the Lower High Street, St John's Street and Baskerville in November 2012, the Malmesbury Flood Working Group (MFWG: a non-Council residents' group led by Cllr Sanderson) has been lobbying Wiltshire Council and the Environment Agency for works to be undertaken at the Town Bridge to increase the flow of water downstream.

2.2 In November 2013 the then Mayor Cllr John Gundry held a meeting for Councillors, engineers from Wiltshire Council's Land Drainage Department (WCLD) and officers of the Environment Agency (EA) to discuss flood risk management at the Town Bridge and other areas. Following this meeting an EA officer wrote to Wiltshire Council (the entity responsible for the bridge and river) stating the view that silting under the Bridge's archways was impeding the flow of the river and may exacerbate flooding.

2.3 For many months the MFWG and Cllr Gundry lobbied Wiltshire Council, WCLD and the EA for clearance under the bridge to be undertaken, through numerous face to face meetings, emails and attendance at the bi-monthly Operational Flood Working Group meetings. Particularly:

- On 7th May 2014 Cllr Sanderson arranged for WCLD and Wiltshire Council Highways engineers to meet at the Bridge to discuss a way ahead.
- On 13th May EA officers visited the Bridge at the invitation of Cllr Sanderson and in an email of 5th June they again endorsed the clearance and the other works referred to in this Report.
- On 15th May Cllr Gundry wrote to Cllr Jonathon Seed, Wiltshire Council's Cabinet Member for Flooding, asking him to facilitate Land Drainage and Highways' discussions. Cllr Gundry followed this up on 14th June referencing the EA endorsement.

2.4 On 17th July, WCLD's Principal Engineer and contractors from Balfour Beatty surveyed the Bridge and river.

2.5 On 10th October, WCLD's Engineer (Steve Scothern) wrote to Cllr Sanderson with the news that their contractor hoped to start work before the end of November to

- Clear vegetation and silt for 100 yards upstream of the Bridge,
- Repair a drainage pipe leading from the Almshouses to the river.

They were not proposing to clear under the leftmost Bridge arch for fear of exposing weakened foundations. The MFWG intend to meet with Mr Scothern to discuss the scope of work.

3. Flood relief works to Cuckingstool and St Aldhelm's Meads
- 3.1 During the flooding of Cuckingstool Mead (and Lower High Street houses and the Almshouses) of Christmas Eve 2013 and January / February 2014, Prof Edward Evans (a member of the MFWG) noticed that due to the land shapes of the two Meads, flood water was (a) being pushed towards the houses in the High Street (b) was only flowing slowly under the footbridge parallel to the Town Bridge and therefore downstream.
- 3.2 In March 2014 the MFWG presented a report to P&E and subsequently to the Leisure and Youth Committee suggesting the following:
- The low bank and hedge between Cuckingstool and St Aldhelm's Meads be removed and a shallow declivity scooped. The aim was to encourage flood water to stay on the Meads side of the stream running along the rear of the Lower High Street gardens. The MFWG proposed that the Town Council should undertake this work.
 - A shallow depression be scooped out in front of the footbridge in Cuckingstool Mead to encourage flood water to flow faster under the footbridge. MFWG proposed that Wiltshire Council should undertake this work.
- 3.3 As the Meads are designated Fields in Trust (FiT) land, Cllr Gundry sought and obtained permission from Leisure and Youth on 1st April and P&E on 14th May that the Town Council commission a professional survey of the proposed Meads work. This was so that plans could be presented to FiT and form the basis of a specification of work. The cost of the survey would be met from the Town Council funds earmarked in December 2012 for flood relief work.
- 3.4 The dead trees and hedge between the two Meads were removed by the Town Council's groundsmen in March, this clearance having earlier been planned and agreed with the Town Clerk.
- 3.5 On 29th May, WCLD's Engineer, Steve Scothern, wrote to Cllr Sanderson confirming their agreement to undertake the works at the footbridge.
- 3.6 In their email of 5th June, having visited the site (see 2.3), the EA officers endorsed the works to the Meads proposed by the MFWG.
- 3.7 Survey plans of the earthworks at the footbridge (in Cuckingstool Mead) and between the two Meads were prepared by a local land surveyor in early June. On 11th June, having sight of this survey, P&E gave permission for the works to be progressed and as a first step an application for permission be sent to FiT. This was done in late June by the Deputy Town Clerk working with Prof Edwards. Unfortunately FiT informed us that this permission could only be given at one of their twice-yearly meetings, the next one being in September.
- 3.8 The permission from FiT was received on 21st September. Cllr Gundry called a meeting with the MFWG and the Town Clerk to agree next actions:
- The Town Clerk to forward details of the work by the footbridge in Cuckingstool Mead to WCLD, Steve Scothern.
 - Dave Richards of the MFWG to draw up a request for tender document and specification for the earthworks between the two Meads and send these out to tender.

3.9 The current status of these works is as follows.

- The Town Hall and Facilities Committee formally approved the proposed Meads works at their meeting of 8th October.
- WCLD's email of 10th October (see 2.5) confirmed that they wished to start work by the footbridge in November.
- The Town Clerk has received two tenders for the earthworks between the two Meads. He presented this information to Full Council on 21st October and has discussed the tenders with the Mayor and the Chair of P&E. He hopes to let one of them very soon. The monies will come from the Town Council's earmarked flood relief funds (see 3.3).

4. River modelling work

4.1 Although not central to this Report, Committee may wish to know the currently-understood status of the mathematical modelling of the river system undertaken by the EA.

4.2 This work was initiated in discussions with the MFWG by the EA in early 2013. Surveyors visited the Sherston Avon and Town Bridge in September / October 2013 to take measurements. Although expected initially to be completed by April 2014, it now seems that the results of the river modelling will not be available until November – December 2014.

5. Recommendation

The Committee is invited to note the contents of this report

Cllr John Gundry, Chair, P&E
Cllr Ray Sanderson, Malmesbury Flood Working Group
27th October 2014