

Solihull MBC Update on Flooding of May 27th 2018 from the June Parish Council Meeting

For those who were unable to attend the Parish Council meeting of June 12th 2018, the following are notes of the discussion about the flooding of May 27th 2018:

Nick Page, SMBC Chief Executive, introduced himself and his colleagues – Alan Brown and Ed Bradford – as well as Jack Mitchell of Severn Trent. They have come along to the Parish Council meeting to give the residents of Dickens Heath an update on what is happening following the severe floods of May 27th. Ed Bradford gave a presentation – this included slides which showed the storms of May 27th, with the very localised pockets of extreme rainfall which had such an impact on Dickens Heath and other areas in the vicinity.

Nick Page said that SMBC are still in 'recovery mode' following this event – they step in after the 'blue lights' have done their job, and they are currently providing emergency care, rehousing and supporting people while properties are drying out. The next phase is an independent 'after action review' which will begin later this week – it will be an analysis of the immediate response, from the first contact with the emergency services to mobilisation of support and contact with affected residents. The third phase will be to look at what were the underlying causes of the flooding, so that it can be dealt with in the future – work will be done with Severn Trent, the Environment Agency, property developers and landlords. This analysis will take several months.

Ed Bradford summarised the presentation slides – an intense band of rain moved through the Midlands on Sunday May 27th 2018 and the charts showed some very intense patches of rainfall with Dickens Heath in the middle of these. Rainfall measured nearby was 138mm in 24 hours, whereas rainfall measured at Tudor Grange was 31mm in the 24 hours – a massive difference in weather conditions. This intense rain was very localised and arrived with almost no warning. There was an amber warning for weather conditions, but these 'white heat' spots were not expected.

Ed said that SMBC officers have knocked on doors, left cards and asked those affected by the flooding to get in touch with them. So far, 322 properties have reported flooding – 189 with internal flooding, 72 with garage flooding, and 61 with external flooding. They have also visited a further 130 properties. They need to know if there are any other affected residents out there – not everyone wishes to contact SMBC. 100 properties in Cornwood House were affected because the flooding caused a problem with their water supply. The road network was also affected.

Nick Page said that SMBC need to build up a map of information – they need photos, videos, information about the trauma this has caused to residents – eg. seeing sewage in the basements. Evidence is needed in order to get additional support.

Solihull has 2 main rivers – the River Cole and the River Blythe – which are the responsibility of the Environment Agency. Plus there are many water courses which are the responsibility of SMBC or private land owners. Ed Bradford showed a map of the affected areas – the South West of the Borough plus Olton. Several areas in Dickens Heath, Cheswick Green and Tidbury Green were flooded – in Dickens Heath this included Griffin Lane, Beech Lane and Tythe Barn Lane.

SMBC officers have been speaking to residents with a lot of historical knowledge of the area.

Councillor Doreen Wright added that long term residents of the area know that there has been flooding around Beech Lane for the past 70 years and this has not been addressed.

Nick Page said that the May 27th storm has been assessed as a 1 in 800 years rain episode, but with climate change – do the drainage systems put in by developers need to be improved? The answer is yes in his view. This was a pluvial flood – there was no time to use sandbags, it was too intense.

Residents commented that the drainage systems in Dickens Heath are not fit for purpose, that Dickens Heath is built on boulder clay which means that there is lying water and it is regularly flooded. There has been far more development than the current drainage systems were meant to deal with. They asked if Mr Page could give an undertaking that no more houses would be built? Nick Page said he couldn't as it is the politicians who make such decisions through planning and Council processes.

Discussions moved on to Cornwood House – which filled up like a bath during the floods. If the drains are overwhelmed by rain and back up – then manholes will lift, and water can come back up through sinks and toilets.

A resident asked whether the level of the canal could have been reduced sooner – Nick Page said that they didn't get the warning to be able to do this.

Another resident questioned the accountability of the developers given that some residents have now been flooded more than once.

Ed Bradford and Nick Page then summarised what SMBC officers have been doing:

- Making sure people are safe, knocking on doors, and helping those that are vulnerable.
- As Lead Local Flood Authority, SMBC are starting the investigation and working with their partners – the formal investigation and its findings will be published.
- They are working with partners and communities – delivering sandbags; inspecting culverts, gulleys and water courses on private land; and liaising with Severn Trent, the Environment Agency and the Canal & River Trust.
- They will enter private land, under their statutory responsibilities, to check that water courses are being maintained.
- They will work with legal advisors to ensure that developers remain responsible for maintaining water courses and flood defences.

A resident suggested that responsibility for flooding should sit with developers for 10/20 years after the completion of the development. If after 10/20 years there has been no flooding, then the developers can walk away. At the moment they just move on, but there has been consistent flooding and Solihull MBC is left to pick up the problem.

A resident commented that people driving their 4x4 cars through the flooded roads kept pushing water back into the flooded houses – a number of properties were flooded by inconsiderate drivers. Can the roads be shut? Nick Page said that not even the emergency services can shut the roads in such circumstances as access and capacity would be too difficult.

A resident commented that when they needed support, people came to watch them and filmed them – like they were animals in a zoo. Residents need to know what can be done when this sort of thing happens. The resident acknowledged that SMBC did come out to help them. In this situation sandbags wouldn't have worked – there was just too much water. Severn Trent have been out to check the drains, but there is a very dangerous manhole and still nothing has been done – when will Severn Trent sort it out? Councillor Doreen Wright commented that she reported this manhole about 5 weeks ago, she rang SMBC, and a cone appeared on it after a fortnight. Nick Page commented that his advice to Severn Trent would be to get a crew to deal with the manhole the next morning. Jack Mitchell confirmed that they would do this.

Borough Councillor Richard Holt introduced himself – he is a resident of Dickens Heath, as well as an elected representative, and he is now a member of SMBC's Planning Committee. He paid respect to how the emergency services and SMBC reacted to the flooding, and said that the follow up to this needs to be dealt with using sound scientific evidence - they need to learn from this.

There has been no engagement from Bellway at all - Nick Page said that he would be happy to ring Bellway's Chief Executive and ask him to meet with residents.

There is concern about the concrete structure of Cornwood House and Waterside, and whether it will be safe having been flooded. Structural engineers need to be checking this. Nick Page commented that the insurers should be pushing for this to ensure that the flood recovery is done properly. But it seems to be being done through Dickens Heath Management Co. and Savills. Mr Page said that he would contact the Receivers and speak to them the next day.

The point of contact for people to get in touch with SMBC about the flooding is the email address drainage@solihull.gov.uk and business cards with this information were available.

The SMBC officers involved in the flooding recovery are: Ed Bradford (flooding), Alan Brown (structural) and Alison McGrory (supporting people eg. who have had to move out of their homes).

A resident asked whether the Environment Agency are trying to make the area a critical drainage area? Ed Bradford replied that there aren't any of these in the area, but they can speak to them about it.

A resident commented that a lot of drains and culverts are blocked. Ed Bradford replied that Severn Trent were out cleansing these last week, and SMBC contractors were out cleansing yesterday - but he will follow this up.

Nick Page commented that SMBC will have to find funding going forward - they will have to make a case for additional funding to the Environment Agency and to National Government. Residents can help them to make a stronger case by sending in information and evidence.

The balancing pond in the nature reserve is very overgrown - is there evidence of it overflowing? Councillor Maureen Holloway asked whether the balancing pond could be dredged? Ed Bradford replied that they would have a look and it may be an option.

A question was asked of Severn Trent representative Jack Mitchell - there have been rumours of a pump failing? Jack confirmed that no pump failed on the day in the vicinity of Beech Lane, but the one on Broom Lane did and it caused flooding. It was argued that residents shouldn't have to pay for this - Severn Trent should. There needs to be transparency.

Nick Page then said that they will learn lessons from the immediate response to this event and the findings will be published. And they will ask - could they have responded quicker? They do not want to make any changes to flood defences that may have an adverse effect elsewhere. Any changes need to be very precise. He expects an initial report to be available in 3 to 6 months' time, and he expects this to recommend immediate actions along with those for the medium term and longer term. A resident commented that this will need to be incorporated into the Solihull Local Plan. Developers currently produce flood plans which SMBC then verifies. But developers should take responsibility for their flood plans for a number of years. At the moment SMBC have to deal with the impact of any flooding. But there should be a contract with developers, eg for 25 years, that would mean that if there are any flood events within the first 25 years - the developer would have to take responsibility.

A resident said that more water could be drained into the canal - there needs to be more linked up thinking.

A resident suggested that the pond on the new development at Rumbush Lane needs to be made larger, and there are blockages on either side. Ed Bradford confirmed that this still belongs to the

developers David Wilson and Bellway. It has been cleared – but they will be pursuing this with David Wilson and Bellway.

A resident asked whether the drains are being cleared? Ed Bradford replied that SMBC have responsibility for 39,000 gulleys on the sides of roads. There are 5 full time employees who systematically go round cleaning them out. All are done once every year – but Ed acknowledged that some may need doing more often, and so they will be looking at whether they should be targeting areas. But this needs to be done with sufficient evidence.

The Parish Council thanked Nick Page, Ed Bradford, Alan Brown and Jack Mitchell for their informative update. The officers then stayed to speak on a one to one basis with residents who had any further questions.