

The Parish Council of Dickens Heath

Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on Tuesday June 12th 2018 in the Parish Rooms, Waterside

Present:

Dickens Heath Parish Councillors; Trevor Eames, Maureen Holloway (Chair), David Jones, Diane Potter, Nargis Rashid, Alan Scholes, Doreen Wright.

Solihull MBC Councillors; Richard Holt, James Butler

Solihull MBC Officers; Nick Page (Chief Executive), Alan Brown, Ed Bradford

Severn Trent Officer; Jack Mitchell

36 members of the public

Clerk: Ms Helen Marczak

Minute 28 (2018/19) Apologies for Absence

None.

Minute 29 (2018/19) Update on 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. Land owners are responsible for watercourses on their land – SMBC just enforce if action is necessary, the Environment Agency do likewise with the main rivers.

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 at the crossroads of Birchy Leasowes Lane, Dickens Heath Rd and Cleobury 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 because 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 in 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 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.

Minute 30 (2018/19) Solihull Local Plan

Nick Page stayed to participate in the update on the Solihull Local Plan Review. The next stage is expected to be the draft plan in October or November 2018 – the housing pressures remain and if SMBC don't come up with sufficient numbers of housing then the Plan will fail. The concern about further housing and flooding remains in Dickens Heath – the Parish Council strongly objected to the planning application for the Bellway site. Nick Page confirmed that the investigation report into this flooding and mitigation will be completed before the SLP and his team will be advising Borough Councillors to take this flooding into account, and that any further development will need to have the infrastructure to withstand flooding. Mr Page added that it is very important that SMBC have lots of evidence to add weight to their arguments against building. Developers have challenged SMBC in the past, and won. And planners have 'no teeth' once developers have moved on. So the gathering of sufficient evidence is key.

Councillor David Jones commented that forward planning is needed, otherwise the area will just become a concrete jungle – Nick Page replied that SMBC's actions are constrained by planning laws.

Parish Councillor Nargis Rashid left the meeting at 9.10pm.

Minute 31 (2018/19) Solihull Local Plan Review Traffic Study

Parish Councillors are attending a meeting with SMBC officers to discuss this later in June.

Minute 32 (2018/19) Village Issues

Chair Maureen Holloway commented that the Parish Council is trying to progress several projects, including the memorial and additional welcome gates, which are dependent on a response from SMBC officers – and we are simply not getting any replies, despite reminders. Nick Page suggested that he be copied in to our correspondence where we are not getting any replies from SMBC officers.

Minute 33 (2018/19) Public ParticipationGreen Recycling Bin in Dangerous Location

Borough Councillor James Butler gave an update about the background of this – it is an illegal ‘recycling’ bin, not a charity bin. Charity bins are stolen, repainted and then sited where donations are made – the goods are then sold. Such bins say ‘recycling’ rather than mentioning any charity. This one is in hand and will be removed.

Negligence of Roads on Bellway Site

Residents of the Bellway site are very concerned about the terrible state of the roads – which are still owned by Bellway. Many residents have suffered damage to their car tyres and other parts of their cars, which is costing them a lot of money. If this happened on a public road, then they could make a claim for the damage. At Tidbury Heights, which is also a Bellway site, the roads are now tarmac. But at the Dickens Heath site, Bellway have taken the top of the roads off – residents want to know why. It was agreed that the Clerk should contact Bellway about this.

Tidbury Triangle – Faster Internet Project

Sarah Oakley introduced herself, and gave a quick summary on the work of Tidbury Triangle – which is trying to get faster internet to parts of Tidbury Green and Dickens Heath. This includes addresses in Tythe Barn Lane, Birchy Leasowes Lane, Birchy Close and Fishers Drive which are not part of the new Dickens Heath internet infrastructure. Open Reach has quoted a cost of £145,000 for 422 properties – but there are grants available. It was suggested that Sarah could bring some leaflets along to Festival on the Green where the Parish Council will have a stall.

Minute 34 (2018/19) Declarations of Interest/Requests for Dispensations

None.

Minute 35 (2018/19) Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Council held on Tuesday May 8th 2018

Proposed by Councillor Potter, seconded by Councillor Wright, it was **Resolved** that the minutes be approved as a true and accurate record.

Minute 36 (2018/19) Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Tuesday May 8th 2018

Proposed by Councillor Potter, seconded by Councillor Wright, it was **Resolved** that the minutes be approved in principle as a true and accurate record.

Minute 37 (2018/19) Actions from the Minutes of the previous meeting

Deferred.

Minute 38 (2018/19) Planning Applications

There were also 2 additional planning applications: 2018/01544 - Wood Farm, Bill’s Lane - temporary change of use of Christmas tree storage building for internal car parking for the period January to October; and 2018/01433 - 172 Tythe Barn Lane - demolition of existing bungalow & erection of replacement house.

No comments.

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Signature.....

Date.....

Minute 39 (2018/19) Financial Matters

Proposed by Councillor Holloway, seconded by Councillor Potter, **Resolved** that the payments in Appendix I of the June 12th 2018 Agenda be approved – 2 direct debits and 23 payments totalling £6,683.71. This included additional payments of £16.43 to Opus for gas and £288.00 to Sapphire Management Services for annual keyholding.

Report on the Finances of the Council

This was received and Councillor Di Potter verified the bank reconciliation to the bank statement.

Audit Report

Deferred.

Minute 40 (2018/19) Parish Council Proposed Move to the Library

Following a meeting this morning with SMBC library officers, the Parish Council needs to decide whether it definitely wishes to move its premises from 1 Wharf House and into the first floor of the library. The overall feeling of Councillors is that it would be a better, central, location for the PC and would support the library by sharing the costs of the building – it was agreed that the Parish Council should move to the library, and that discussions should progress as soon as possible.

Meeting ended 9.45pm

Next Meeting : Tuesday July 10th 2018: 7.15pm The Parish Rooms