

minutes



Meeting FLOODING SELECT COMMITTEE

Date Monday, 11 December 2006 (commencing at 10.00 am)

Membership

Persons absent are marked with 'A'

COUNCILLORS

Councillor Yvonne Davidson (Chair)
Councillor Brian Wombwell (Vice-Chair)

A John Carter
John Clarke
Sybil Fielding
Pat Lally

A Tom Pettengell
Peter D Prebble
Sue Saddington

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Councillor V H Dobson

MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting held on 13 November 2006, having been circulated, were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Peter D Prebble.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

None.

PRESENTATION FROM SEVERN TRENT PLC

Derek Lord, Chartered Civic and Drainage Engineer from Severn Trent Plc gave a presentation on Severn Trent's role in relation to planning and development control. A handout of his presentation was circulated to Members. The Select Committee learned:-

- the aim and application of the planning process,
- The basic rules that local authority planners follow

- Flood risk and sewerage as material considerations
- The respective roles of the Environment Agency and Severn Trent for flood protection and mitigation
- Severn Trent policy on planning consultations
- Use of Severn Trent Development Control planning condition requests to comment upon a planning application
- Flood Risk Assessment Reports and
- Severn Trent's operations role during flooding incidents.

Mr Lord drew particular attention to flood risk and sewerage provision and said that these were material considerations in the planning process. Failure to take account of these was likely to cause economic loss due to flood damage, future inability to obtain house and contents insurance and misery to families flooded out of their homes. He said that the Planning Policy Guidance 25 sought to ensure that greater weight was put on flooding and sewerage issues by local authority planners.

In terms of land drainage, Mr Lord pointed out that the Environment Agency was responsible for protecting the land drainage system and that the Agency had no direct interest in sewers other than the fact that surface water sewers discharge into watercourses and can affect peak flow rate and flooding risk.

It was acknowledged that local planning authorities were under pressure to meet targets for the provision of housing when there was a shortage of land available. There was an intention to have a 3 month cooling off period in proposed new guidance to allow discussion if a local planning authority is minded to approve an application against advice of the Environment Agency.

Mr Lord explained that Severn Trent's role as sewerage undertaker was to provide a level of service against flooding so that property was not put at unacceptable risk. They had no direct interest in or responsibility for land drainage flooding although this could cause sewer flooding by overland flow, drowning out of sewer outfalls and floodwater entering sewers.

Following Mr Lord's presentation, the Select Committee was invited to ask questions.

In response to comments made by Councillor Saddington, Mr Lord explained that homeowners did have a responsibility for the repair or maintenance of drainage pipe work. Private drainage and sewers was a major problem to Severn Trent since they were not funded to deal with these. He said that a change to this was anticipated around 2010 with the intention that once a pipe within someone's property leaves their boundary this will become a public obligation. This would also mean an increase in the cost for sewerage to the homeowner.

Mr Lord also pointed out that in terms of development it was the decision of the local planning authority at the end of the day and that Severn Trent Water as sewerage

undertaker was consulted on and would seek to comment to ensure that a development was dealt with in the best way possible in terms of drainage. The Environment Agency or Severn Trent can make the local planning authority refuse an application in which proposed development could be put at unacceptable risk of flooding.

It was felt that developers should not be allowed to build anywhere in floodplain. The Select Committee referred to some of the problems in their areas and the anxieties caused to residents from previous flooding and felt that there was not enough being done. Councillor Pettengell commented on manhole covers being lifted during flooding and the danger involved. Mr Smith also from Severn Trent said that they wouldn't expect the public to touch manholes and that he would take his comment on board for inclusion in its advice leaflet in the future.

In response to a question from Councillor Carter, Mr Lord explained that Severn Trent did not develop land. They disposed of land to developers and applied the same rules to all them. Mr Lord referred to the flood risk constrain maps provided by the Environment Agency to identify areas that could be at risk of flooding and said that no development should take place in flood zone 3 (defined as a high risk area). Each development was looked at on its own merits.

He added that the Environment Agency had issued guidance to local planning authorities on applications that they would like to see. Its aim was to catch applications that were significant.

In terms of Severn Trent's input on planning application consultations it was explained that applications were provided by the local planning authority. Those that did not involve new building construction works were discounted and the remaining applications were then checked against the floods register and system capacity. Comments were required from Severn Trent where there was a public sewer located within or immediately adjacent to the site. Severn Trent provided comments on capacity issues and on impact on the sewerage system through means of check list criteria. Different criteria were applied to residential development than industrial/commercial. If an area was subject to flooding then Severn Trent would get involved and attach a planning condition to ensure that the development was provided with a satisfactory means of drainage as well as reduce the risk of a flooding problem and minimise the risk of pollution.

Councillor Carter wondered how the systems were coping with consumption on the rise owing to an increase in developments, Mr Lord explained the basis upon which Severn Trent collated its data and future plans that included a submission of a detailed report to OFWAT (the economic regulator for the water and sewerage industry in England and Wales) in 2009.

Mr Lord acknowledged the problem with sewerage flooding in the Kelham Road area of Newark and said that some properties had been dealt with and that they were bidding for money to deal with the rest of the area.

WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair referred to DEFRA's decision to cut £14.9m from the Environment Agency's flood risk management budget. It was suggested that it would be beneficial

to include an extra meeting to speak with representatives of the Environment Agency about the proposed cuts. This would also mean seeking an extension from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Select Committee agreed to invite representatives from the Environment Agency to its meeting on 12 March 2007 to talk about the proposed cuts to its flood risk management budget.

It was agreed that an extension be sought from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to extend the work programme for one month to April 2007.

VISIT TO THE COUNTY COUNCIL'S EMERGENCY RESPONSE CENTRE

The Select Committee visited the County Council's Emergency Response Centre which is located in the County Hall basement. They learnt of the facilities used by the team and of recent investments to the centre. The centre was also used for other things such as business continuity.

The Select Committee also heard first hand from Linda Bayliss, Service Director, Adult Social Services and Health of how a service department often had to work closely with the Emergency Planning team, in event of an incident.

Mr Fisher referred to the refurbishment of the City Council's emergency planning offices that were due to be completed early in the new year and suggested to the Select Committee that they might wish to go on a visit.

The meeting closed at 12.25pm.

CHAIR

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