

LOWER VALE OF PICKERING PARISHES LIAISON GROUP

MEETING 8TH FEBRUARY 2009

Minutes

Present: Stephen Edwards (acting Chairman), Chris Bowles, Paul Andrews, David Denton, Keith Richardson, Tom Peace, Jane Wilford, Ian Brown, Chris Tetley, John Lindley, Nigel Ballard, and David Jackson.

Apologies: Richard Scott, Peter Easterby, Peter Milner.

The minutes of the last meeting were approved and signed.

There were no matters arising.

Chris Bowles presented an update on the current situation.

We had now received the third "draft River Derwent Catchment Flood Management Plan". This ran into over 700 pages, but only the summary had been sent out - the drainage boards had received the full document in a CD, which Chris was still examining.

This document was better than the earlier ones. The consultation period was reasonable – the return date being in April – and there had been substantial collaboration between the Environment Agency and the Drainage Boards and Chris, whereas before there had been none.

the Agency accepts that they don't know exactly how the hydrology of the river and drainage systems in the Vale of Pickering work, and that further work is required to ascertain this.

It was a high level policy document. Chris had concerns in regard to the longer term, but pointed out that more studies and elaboration of the detail of the document was required. This would be done through further analysis in "System Management Plans".

The essence of the document was still on making flood management "more sustainable". The document still recommended reconnecting the rivers to their respective flood plains, and on taking and using agricultural land for flood storage. However, the Agency now seemed to accept that existing flood defences should be maintained over about half of the Vale of Pickering. The area where the Agency still propose to discontinue maintenance of flood defences is shown coloured green on a map in the document and described as "Uplands", although this "upland" area seemed to include the lowland areas North of Hemsley and West of Pickering.

Richard Scott's comments were read out, namely:

He was pleased to note there was more emphasis in the document on property compared with earlier versions. There were one or two references to river and flood bank maintenance, but not enough. He thought the EA had shifted their ground slightly, but were not really wholehearted in providing flood defence.

Peter Easterby had commented: "Just clean the rivers out".

Andrew Raines had mentioned there had been a willow tree in the middle of the river near Reyton Bridge for over a year, and despite a report to the EA, no action had been taken.

Further comments were made as follows:

There is a need to rally behind the Drainage Boards, to save our villages and farm lands.

Whilst everybody is concerned about protecting the environment, this should not be at the detriment of people living and working in the Vale of Pickering.

Food production is becoming increasingly important, and there was a need to protect farm land.

As in the case of the two previous reports, the emphasis is heavily in favour of protecting the more densely populated areas and allowing the “river to connect to its natural flood plain” in the sparsely populated areas. There are some references to the quality of the agricultural land, but this hardly figures in the document.

Nevertheless, it is reassuring to see a commitment (in the short term and pending further work) to manage the Agency’s assets (ie flood banks) “to ensure that the current standard of protection is maintained”. However this commitment only extends to the flood banks in about half of the district.

The other half of the district is given the name: “The Uplands”. This is a misnomer, because it would seem to include lowland areas, particularly all the villages and land Westwards of Kirby Moorside, including land to the North of a line which roughly passes between Helmsley and Filey. This area is shown on maps at Page 10 and 25, but it is in very small scale, and it is not clear, for example, if it includes parishes or villages such as Habton, Marton, Butterwick, Brawby, Amotherby or Normanby or indeed the town of Kirby Moorside. This needs to be clarified.

It is this so-called “upland” area that the EA still intend to “restore the natural flood storage by allowing the river to connect with the floodplain to slow the passage of water out of the area”.

This is completely unacceptable in any event, and is premature as, if this policy is implemented, it will be at a time when the EA acknowledge their lack of understanding of the local drainage and river hydrology, and will therefore pre-empt any work they intend to do on this.

Further the EA should be aware of the impact of such proposals on the cost of insurance for properties which might be shown as within a “flood plain” area, and the consequent reduction on property values. No such proposals or policies should be finalised unless the property owners concerned are fully compensated.

The meeting noted that the EA continue to argue that the effectiveness of the new flood defences in Malton/Norton “will reduce over time as a result of climate change”. This is completely misleading. The only reason for any reduction of effectiveness over time is the Agency’s failure to dredge the river: as more silt is deposited, so the level of the river bed rises, and it is that which will eventually result in an over topping of the flood defences. The suggestion that the way to deal with this is to store flood water on people’s property upstream is outrageous and should not be accepted.

Pickering

It was understood that the Agency are now saying that the figures produced by the University team are wrong and that the storage capacity of bunds above Newton Dale would not provide adequate protection for the town.

The meeting thought that the Agency's statement should not be accepted at its face value. The university group should be provided with all the necessary calculations and be invited to comment on them. Our own expert, Chris Bowles, should also be asked for a view.

There should be more wood clearing on the Pickering Beck.

Generally

Scarborough, Ryedale and the Drainage Boards had agreed to jointly fund with the Environment Agency a thorough Channel Management Study, and are investing a lot of public money in this. It was understood that the EA would let and manage the contract for this work. It was therefore extremely important that there is seen to be some effective degree of local control over the public money which will be entrusted to the EA. The bodies which had the most expertise and knowledge of the situation are the drainage boards and their consultant hydrologist who drew the scoping report for the study. Chris should be allowed to vet the contract specification to ensure that this covers all the matters listed in his scoping report, and should also be allowed to monitor the progress of the contract.

It was noted that there was a meeting of the Council's liaison group on Thursday 11th February and it was agreed that the views of the meeting should be made known at this meeting.

It was agreed to hold the next meeting on 22nd March at Cundalls' offices at 7.30 pm. This would enable a draft set of comments to be prepared for agreement by the meeting and submission to the EA before the end of the Consultation period.