

Flooding in Membury - Annual report - February 2010

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3rd February 2010

Flood Risk at Membury – Annual Report

Further to our meeting on 26th January 2009 and Stephen's report dated 3rd February 2009 it is worth updating the actions resulting from these, assessing their impact and identifying additional or outstanding actions.

1. Self help

Those people with properties most at risk have all taken additional precautions – although none has decided to add ramps at their roadside entrances. Each has installed a variety of flood gates at strategic positions outside their properties, some with financial assistance from the EDDC/EA Grant scheme.

The exhibition in Ottery St Mary last autumn was most helpful in allowing householders to assess the differing systems.

2. Filter Strips

This work was undertaken as a relatively short-term improvement that could be undertaken prior to and supporting “Section 5 – Storage Lagoons” below.

Following discussions the Parish Council was able to gain the use of a strip of land at the immediate top of Bonds Lane. We are extremely grateful to the land owners for allowing and supporting this.

The field corner and some 300m of the stream were planted in late spring with some 400 - 450 local species whips and truncheons in accordance with Stephen Moore’s recommendations. By planting some in and around the stream edges, this has also had the effect of widening and dispersing the water flow (as opposed to the deepening channels that were being created previously).

The filter strip appears to have reduced the intensity and speed of flow into and down Bonds Lane.

Although it is too early to be certain, over the autumn and winter period so far, this work does seem to have reduced the flow of debris in to the storm drain system and, as a consequence has reduced/removed the need for EDDC to regularly empty the sump. A most cost effective scheme!

This work was funded by locals and Parish Council and implemented by local volunteers. EDDC have continued their regular inspection of the sump.

3. Flood Alarm

With the help of Locality Budget funds through our County Councillor we have purchased and installed an automated Flood Alarm system. When the flood water significantly overflows the Storm Drain Sump situated at the bottom (south) end of Bonds Lane an auto-dialler is triggered which in turn initiates a community telephone ring-around scheme alerting a further 25-30 householders most at risk in both Membury village and Rock. At present this is a mains operated system but we want to look at providing a back-up power supply (UPS).

Further work is in preparation to extend this alarm scheme with audible siren links – hopefully activated automatically from the prime system. To date we know we can buy sirens from electrical component distributors and could use the same wireless link to move in 150 – 200m steps down the village or on to Rock. With us sourcing, building and fitting estimate the cost of each siren link to be around £300 – dependent upon siren spec.

These activities will form part of and be linked in to the Membury Parish Emergency Plan being prepared by the Parish Council.

4. Highways

Although not noted as a separate item in Stephen’s report, we had discussed the necessity to reduce the surface water flow coming down the main entrance road into Membury from Clarence Cross to The Post Office and thence down the main street of Membury village and on to Rock. This was identified by us as being caused by a combination of:-

blocked drainage ways/culverts below Clarence Cross:

inadequate diameter pipe forming the culvert under the entrance to New House Farm lane (EDDC property):

restrictions in the underground pipe between New House Farm entrance and the trough outside Hallendale (by the chestnut tree):

insufficient and incorrectly placed road drains.

Highways budgetted in 2009/10 to re-surface, increase the size and number of road drains, clear/replace the underground pipe [the Parish Council requested that this be replaced by an open ditch so that we could maintain it and keep it clear but this was refused by Highways on cost grounds]. The first two of these items were completed (the new drain opposite Springfield and surface smoothness being particularly good). Some drains are proud of the water flow despite 2 attempts to get them right – and after a few man-days of effort the contractors replaced a section of underground pipe claiming “no problem”. The drainage water is now forming its own surface course below New House Farm entrance as there is insufficient permitted flow for it through the underground pipe – the restriction apparently being below the pipe section that was lifted and inspected! This exercise has again proved to be a waste of effective use of a limited Highways budget – now claimed to have run out, again.

Thus, this problem still exists and will sooner or later cause flooding of properties again. The lengthsman has cleared and maintained the blocked drainage ways.

5. Flood water storage lagoons

We have taken on board the concerns expressed with regard to the potential damage any damming solution might present should it ever fail. Hence we have only considered below-ground storage. The works here are intended to provide storage of flash flood-water and provide a controlled and manageable release in to the existing watercourse [and Filter Strip see Section 2 above].

Under the leadership of the Parish Council further discussions and studies have been undertaken with the relevant land owners. Estimates have been obtained from local Civil Engineering Contractors to re-landscape and re-contour the field to encourage the natural run of excess water in to an old chalk pit situated between the top (north) of Bonds Lane (BW33) and Challenger Farm. The ground would be re-established for cropping or grazing as at present. This pit should act as a below-ground holding pond with natural slow release into the local aquifer. The estimated cost of this work is around £9000.

The relevant landowner has agreed that, providing we re-site the field entrance some 100 m west along the lane, we could create a holding or stilling pond with controlled water release at the northern end of BW33 beside the lane which runs from Challenger Cross to Furley Cross/Bedlam Lane. This area is a natural low point and is at the confluence of the Challenger Farm field drains, ditch and clean water lagoon overspill culvert, the road drain from the Chard road and from the higher ground to the east. Again, we have estimates for the necessary earth moving, although there would be a relatively small extra cost to provide the necessary controlled slow-release weir. The estimated works cost of this would be £3500.

Proposals 5.1 & 5.2 form the final longer-term link in our agreed Strategic Flood Protection Scheme for Membury and Rock. They should provide the final link in our safety chain and be the safety net against the forecasted ever increasing risk of severe flash flooding, itself magnified by our geographical features. It is recognised that these proposals are competing with many others for scarce funds, however, the parishioners have already demonstrated their preparedness to financially support agreed works and we need to have discussions about how the Parish can creatively finance this work through available grants, matched-financing and Parish Precepts over time.

6. Agricultural Land Use

Like DEFRA and EA we have not moved forward on this front. The growing of maize is seen as a major causal problem in our area – but farmers are of differing opinions as to the cost effectiveness of this crop. Crucially those that farm key fields in the flood catchment area feel that it is a necessary part of their rotation.

7. Outstanding Actions

The meeting proved very helpful to the Parish Council and we thank all those who attended and contributed.

The Parish Council has worked to a consistent plan of action and made reasonable, if rather steady, progress in encouraging “self-help” and with both the filter strip and flood alarm.

The Parish Council needs help with:-

Section 5 Lagoons – Andrew, Paul, Stephen and Jane can we please discuss methods of funding this at a time and place to suit you? [At least Nick & Harry from the Parish Council would obviously also be involved in this.]

Section 3. 3 Siren links – Stephen & Jane, any help and advice or contacts you could give me on this would be much appreciated. I have been advised by your folks that there will not be a legal problem with the noise. I did make contact with an EA group based in Exmouth whose office junior said they were working on a similar scheme in East Devon & W. Dorset for localised use using 120dB sirens but the relevant engineer never got back to me. The siren spec and cost is the most substantial element of these links. We feel an audible alarm could be better than relying on people phoning – and being in! Stephen can you and I talk about this – or can you put me in touch with someone else with relevant knowledge in EA?

Section 4. 2 – Jane & Keith what can we do about the culvert under the EDDC access lane – if the underground pipe restrictions are ever resolved (§4.3) then the water will, again, start running down the road from above New House Farm lane entrance.

Section 4. 3 – Peter what can be done to resolve the underground pipe blockage? Can you please contact Nick Yool so that we can make a new plan.

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