



Briefing Paper

Operation Watershed Singleton Valley Flood Action Group

Date: 3 November 2015

Background

In the second year of West Sussex County Council's (WSCC) Operation Watershed Active Communities Fund, five grants were awarded to Singleton Parish Council and Singleton Valley Flood Action Group SVFAG.

The projects and grant values were;

2018	Singleton Flood Works	£4,686.00
2030	Flood Action Group start-up costs	£1,650.00
2075	Flood resilience equipment	£727.28
2100	A286 flood barrier	£3,331.20
2110	River Lavant works	£13,041.60

The planning and scoping of works were developed in conjunction with WSCC, Chichester District Council (CDC) and the Environment Agency (EA).

In response to residents volunteering to form a formal Flood Action Group under the guidance of the National Flood Forum, Singleton Parish Council supported and facilitated the set-up of this independent group.

Purpose

Following concerns about the recent work carried out within the main river section of the River Lavant through Singleton this paper is intended to outline the findings of inspections of the works by officers of both WSCC and EA and sets out the findings in relation to concerns raised by residents.

Since the commencement of work by contractors commissioned by the Singleton Volunteer Flood Action Group (SVFAG) a number of specific concerns have been raised by two parish councilors. The concerns drawn to the attention of WSCC, and multiple other agencies, are;

- Lack of consideration for local ecology
- Damage or destruction of water vole habitat
- Damage or destruction of features of historic interest
- Excavation of the chalk bed of the River Lavant
- Damage to river banks
- Damage to a private bridge structure
- Unauthorised or inappropriate removal of tree vegetation

Inspection Assessment

In summary the parish council and residents should be reassured the inspections found no valid basis for any concerns listed above.

Consideration of local ecology

In the preparation and development of the scope of works a number of known local ecological considerations were raised and considered. A report on the flora and fauna for the village pond was reviewed.

The EA was asked to highlight any preferred methods of working and additional considerations.

Water Vole Habitat

There are no records of any known water vole activity in the wider proximity of Singleton village within the county, district or national databases.

The Roberts report of November 2006, "Otter and Water Vole Report for the Rivers Ems and Lavant", indicates much of the upper Lavant environment would not be conducive to providing water vole habitat and significant change to riparian management practice would need to be engendered.

On inspection, the works on river bank elements have not disturbed areas of complex vegetation which could offer appropriate habitat but has been limited to exposed or grass banks.

The river Lavant and the village pond had been dry for some 3-months at the time of the works and no significant body of water was evident to support water vole activity at this time.

Historical Features

The historic maps of Sussex 1896-99 indicate "Sheepwash" located between Brook Cottage and the cricket pitch playing fields.

Claims that there were historic structures removed by the contractors at this point have been unsupported. Feedback from the parish council indicates some structural elements were removed by local residents some years ago.

The contractors have, in carrying out the approved gravel removal, uncovered a red-brick base at bed level which remains intact and may be the remnants of the sheepwash.

The officers are satisfied no structure has been disturbed or removed by the contractors.

Excavation of chalk river bed

In the planning and scoping of these works all parties were very aware of the sensitive nature of the river Lavant. The selected contractor was identified as qualified and appropriately experienced in carrying out such works in this area and has been commissioned for similar works along the Lavant valley.

The inspection carried out by officers of WSCC found the works to reflect exactly what was expected in delivering the approved scope. The removal of silt and gravel deposits has been achieved and the chalk bed remains covered to a large extent ensuring the levels match the invert levels of a number of piped and bridged sections in the area of work.

While powered barrows were used in the bed to transport spoil, only hand tool methods were deployed for actual clearance.

Following an initial inspection by an operative of the EA the feedback has been positive and indeed he commented that more river maintenance should be carried out in a similar way.

Damage to river banks

The inspection by officers found the re-profiling of the banks were also exactly how was intended.

From the western limit of the works, at the junction of the A286 and Town Lane, to the A286 road bridge in the village the works have been sensitive and appropriate.

Damage to bridge

The inspection by officers could find no evidence of any damage to the bridges and structures along the route of works. While specific concern had been flagged regarding missing brickwork from a bridge at Cowper Lodge, the engineer could find no evidence of such, either internally or externally, and the bridge is considered sound.

Removal of trees

There remains at least one tree on the north bank between the bus stop and The Coach House which was identified for removal in the scoping exercise undertaken by WSCC and CDC. It is hoped and anticipated this can be removed prior to the river rising.

All trees were found to be as inspected in February 2015. The trees and the substantive root systems have not been compromised or undermined by the bank-work as had been raised as a concern.

The officers are assured that all tree removal is being progressed with the full support of appropriate property owners and in line with required consents and a planning application is being submitted which WSCC fully support.

Conclusions

WSCCC fully supports the valuable works being undertaken in Singleton. This, and the provision of equipment to help residents protect themselves at times of increased flood risk, helps to demonstrate a keen community spirit.

The visual appearance of the bed and bank works at this time is exactly as anticipated. Once the grassed banks re-establish vegetation they will rapidly return to their original look. Once the river rises and flow clears sediment and soil from the bed it too will improve the appearance.

The work carried out by the contractor is to be commended.

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