

BARFORD SHERBOURNE AND WASPERTON JOINT PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the special meeting of the Joint Parish Council held at Sherbourne Village Hall on Thursday 23rd September 2004.

Present: Cllr J V Murphy (Chairman)
Cllr M P Byerley Cllr R G Mulgrue Cllr W Worrall Cllr Mrs A
Gordon Cllr Mrs J A Jackson Cllr G G Morris Cllr J T Wright

In Attendance: Cllr R G Butler

Apologies: Cllr R Clay Cllr Mrs M A Hayward Cllr K S Hope Cllr S G Starkey
Cllr G P Grima Cllr Mrs S G Dean Cllr Dr M J Metcalfe

Introduction

135 The purpose of this special meeting was to receive a briefing from Mr P Coxhill of the Environment Agency (EA) on the rationale for the enmainment of Sherbourne Brook and to answer question from members of the Council and the public.

136 Thereafter Council assembled to consider its strategy.

Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

137 A declarations of personal interest was made by Cllr Mrs J A Jackson; her land adjoins Sherbourne Brook.

Presentation by Environment Agency (Summary)

138 Watercourses are catagorized thus:

138.1 Main Rivers: These are the responsibility of the EA which is empowered to do work to maintain or improve the watercourse. Land drainage regulations allow EA to work in the flood plain. Works by others require EA consent. If a watercourse is designated a main river then the whole of the watercourse from that point to the sea is, by definition, a main river.

138.2 Ordinary Watercourses: These are watercourses which are not defined as main rivers. On these the local authority enjoys similar but lesser powers to those exercised by the EA on main rivers.

139 The EA is under remit from the Government to identify, in partnership with local authorities, those ordinary watercouses with greatest risk of flooding causing financial loss and to change their category to that of a main river (hence the term "enmainment"). In the Midlands 193 such "critical" watercourses have been identified for enmainment; 192 without objection with Sherbourne the exception.

140 The local authority for Snitterfield has identified Bell Brook as one such critical watercourse and, lacking any better information, the EA has accepted this risk analysis and proposed its enmainment. Bell Brook runs into Sherbourne Brook so by the logic of the rule that a main river is continuous from source to sea (see 127.1) it is axiomatic that the latter should be enmainned too, with a completion date of April 2006.

The Debate

- 141 In a sometimes heated debate there arose a consensus that, whatever the intrinsic merits of the proposal, it had neither been well explained nor adequately published. The case for enmainment of Sherbourne Brook hinged on the accuracy of the local authority's risk analysis for Bell Brook, and those present with local knowledge of the area considered the risks to be overstated.
- 142 It was clear that there would be no meeting of minds and the debate was concluded. Although the Council's formal decision had not been agreed the EA representative anticipated it by saying that if the objections were not withdrawn (as he did not think they would) he would start the next part of the procedure by preparing a joint position paper in consultation with those raising the objections for submission to Ministers for a final decision.
- 143 During the debate other matters were raised which, because they are not central to the issue, are not recorded as part of the main discussion but are set down here for completeness:
- 143.1 Maps of Sherbourne had been issued showing a flood plain far in excess of anything known in living memory. EA responded saying that the quality of the hydrological data for the area was not good but even so those maps were being amended and copies would be sent to the Council.
- 143.2 Perhaps arising from 132.1, certain members of the public were concerned that building insurance premiums were being increases excessively.
- 143.3 The issue of the improvements to Junction 15 of the M40 motorway was raised. The greater area of impervious road surfaces would give increased and faster surface water run-off thus increasing the load on the brook.
- 143.4 Concern was expressed about the scope of EA work in the flood plain should enmainment happen, bearing in mind the special environmental merits of the brook. The EA assured the audience that any proposed work (and he anticipated none) would first have to meet the criteria of technical feasibility, economic justification and environmental acceptability, and even then would not be started without prior consultation with landowners and with the EA making good any damage or paying compensation or both.

Council's Decision

- 144 Council RESOLVED not to change its stance on the enmainment proposal.
- 145 Pending the production of the joint position paper, informal contact with Snitterfield Parish Council would be made to discover the parish (as opposed to the local authority) opinion on the risks posed by the flooding of Bell Brook.
- 146 The following is the text of a letter sent by the Chairman to Mr Coxhill on behalf of the Council:
- "Thank you and your colleague for attending our Joint Parish Council meeting this evening.
- I am sure that it was clear that many residents and some councillors were unhappy with the lack of basic information concerning the problem and need in this case and hence were unwilling to accept bland reassurances.

The Council does not feel able to withdraw its objection to your proposals at present, but intends to give the matter further consideration pending some research and will inform you of our position at a later date, probably after our November meeting.

At the meeting you did undertake to supply us with copies of the updated version of indicative flood plain maps for both Sherbourne Brook and Bell Brook as soon as available and we look forward to receiving these to help with our deliberations.

If you can elicit any detail of the alleged flooding risk in Snitterfield or relating to Bell Brook we would be pleased to receive the same as I am sure we might find it reassuring of the actual need to make the changes you propose.”