

Committee: Environment

Agenda Item

Date: 20 January 2009

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Title: River Bourn Flood Study, Ashdon

Author: Phil Hunt, Engineering and Safety Officer,
ext 521

Summary

Following the severe flooding in the village in June 2007, reported to this Committee on 4 September 2007, the Council commissioned a study of the River Bourn through Ashdon in order to investigate possible flood risk reduction measures. The final report was received in October 2008 but concluded that there was no clear cut solution to the problem and that parts of the village will remain at a high risk of flooding.

Subsequent stakeholder discussions have produced a number of proposed actions which are set out below.

Recommendations

That Members give their support to the ongoing programme of action proposed and agree to lobby for the River Bourn through Ashdon to be designated “main river”, enabling the Environment Agency to take the lead in the matter.

Background Papers

River Bourn Flood Study – JBA Consulting – October 2008

Correspondence with Environment Agency – December 2008

Impact

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Communication/Consultation | Consultation has taken place with relevant officers, the parish and county councils and the Environment Agency |
| Community Safety | Not applicable |
| Equalities | Not applicable |
| Finance | Minimal financial implications |

| | |
|-----------------------|----------------|
| Human Rights | Not applicable |
| Legal implications | Not applicable |
| Sustainability | Not applicable |
| Ward-specific impacts | Ashdon |
| Workforce/Workplace | Not applicable |

Situation

- 1 The study carried out by JBA Consultants for the Council determined that the village of Ashdon has a standard of protection of just two years, i.e. flooding of property can be expected on average every two years. This compares with the indicative standard of protection of 25 years which would normally be the aim in such a location.
- 2 None of the individual alleviation measures investigated in the report improved the standard of protection by a significant amount. These included, amongst others, the provision of upstream storage, enlarging bridges, improved maintenance and channel straightening. A combination of all the measures investigated still failed to attain a figure approaching 25 years.
- 3 The Environment Agency was asked to advise on whether any of the measures tested in the report would qualify for grant aid but the view was that the required cost/benefit ratio would not be attained and consequently funding would not be available.
- 4 A number of stakeholder meetings held since have reviewed the way forward and the following ongoing actions have been agreed:
 - JBA Consultants have agreed to make two additional runs of the computer model to investigate further alleviation works at no cost to the council;
 - Essex County Council are being pressed to undertake outstanding works in the village and to replace one footpath bridge as a matter of urgency;
 - Ashdon Parish Council, backed by the District Council, will endeavour to ensure that the river through the village is maintained to a high level and encourage all riparian owners to carry out their obligations to ensure that the flow of water is not obstructed;
 - Householders at risk of flooding will be provided with as much advice as possible to help them protect their own properties. To this end the council is looking into providing a “flood fair” type of event in the village which would also be of benefit to residents of Hempstead and Radwinter;

- All proposed development in the village will be examined to ensure that it does not worsen and, where possible, improves the existing situation.

5 One issue officers wish to pursue is the greater involvement of the Environment Agency in this matter. Following the flooding in 2001, the Agency designated the Bourn through Ashdon a “critical ordinary watercourse”, i.e. one having the potential to cause flooding to a significant number of properties. Subsequently the Government announced that all such watercourses would be “en-mained”, bringing them and the associated flooding under the jurisdiction of the Agency. At this stage the Bourn was removed from the list as not meeting all the appropriate criteria. Officers feel that, in view of the history of flooding in the village, this was an unreasonable decision and are endeavouring to get the “en-mainment” of the Bourn re-visited. The Agency is resisting this. While the Agency have been helpful in evaluating the report, they have made it clear that they do not wish to get involved with flood risk alleviation works on an ordinary watercourse. “Main river” status would mean that the Agency, with its greater resources, rather than the Council, would become the “operating authority”. The Parish Council has contacted the MP to obtain his support and Members are asked to add the Council’s weight to this lobby.

Risk Analysis

| Risk | Likelihood | Impact | Mitigating actions |
|----------------------|------------|--------|-----------------------|
| Flooding of property | 4 | 3 | Flood risk management |

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.