

Transcript of Verbal Submission to WODC Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting on 10/06/2021 at 14:00

Re: Continued Flood Risk and Update from WFMG

William Wareing, Woodford Mill, Mill Street, Witney OX286DE

Continued Flood Risk and Update from WFMG

Hello everyone, thank you for allowing me to address the committee again today on the issue of flooding, on Christmas Eve and in general. I last addressed the meeting 4 months ago – the last actual meeting discussing flood risk.

I am now one of the founders and the spokesperson for WFMG – we speak on behalf of over 100 concerned residents and businesses owners who have joined our action group. We have been hearing, seeing and feeling what they have been going through, first-hand.

A number of EA staff have so far said there is no plan for Witney, we are now in discussion with the EA Area Director and have requested a site visit.

We have received “first-hand” an outpouring of stories from people who are very concerned and those who are disappointed by the lack of action since the 2007 floods. Not everyone wants to come here and address this committee. We are here today representing the voices of many people who were flooded or are at flood risk.

Since we last met in February,

- We founded an action group, set up a website, distributed flyers and spoke to concerned residents. We for one, have a plan!
- We have a river engineer on board our team, and are learning the river and land management terminology and understanding how locks and weirs and sluices work
- We have conducted surveys of Bathing Place to the old Railway Bridges, and assessed the river and its tributaries
- We have assessed Riparian Landownership responsibilities
- We have access to data from river gauges and have done analysis of the heights and timing and relationship between the data collected from river gauges the data is shockingly clear in relation to Witney’s problem
- We joined the Thames Catchment Partnership Scheme and learned how others are balancing environmental and ecological concerns with flood risk
- We completed the EA Thames Valley Flood Scheme Consultation questionnaire as an organisation
- We formally met with All Souls College and are asking them to act as responsible landowners and pointed out all the fallen trees on their land.
- Residents have had to report trees blocking the water courses to the EA for removal, the EA cannot cope with having to clean up behind irresponsible riparian landowners
- We have reported various fallen/blocking trees to the EA and are watching their response speed and timing.
- We have had to seek charitable donations to help people get flood barriers
- We are concerned about wilful negligence and breach of duty towards citizens

We have amassed a lot of knowledge since, and believe the solutions are:

- Proper assessment and maintenance of the area – do you know that river level gauge boards are submerged and therefore invisible when we have floods? No one can even record the water levels for future assessment.
- Regular desilting of the bridge area, and an understanding of options available where it acts as a dam. The bridge may be too expensive to modify however given there is a level of neglect everywhere else, there is a multiplying or compounding effect. And given we have established that the EA warning system did not even work properly on Christmas Eve, we were placed in a position of totally unnecessary risk and some might even call negligent.
- Widening and clearing of ditches and waterways that act as natural floodplains, without affecting communities downstream
- Flood prevention for Eastfield and Hailey Roads
- Flood storage facilities/attenuation schemes upstream of Witney (you will see nearly 20 options for managing floods when Tony presents latter)
- Enforcing Riparian Owners to fulfil their responsibilities keeping waterways adjoining or passing through their land clear of obstructions. That includes land owned by WODC/WTC. A simple stroll beside the river from Bathing Place to the 2 Railway bridges says it all to be honest.
- A clear understanding of the financial impact on us all and a revisit of previous recommendations deemed too expensive for a once in 100 years but may now be feasible given the average of once every 7 years, which we know will increase.
- We want to see you fighting for your community and those within your responsibility from this frankly neglectful position, to improve their lives and their mental wellbeing and give them hope for the future.
- No more circular conversations where the LLFA defers to WODC, WODC refers to the LLFA or the EA. If OCC have no capability to undertake their LEGAL obligations, then an appropriate solution must be reached. The RMA's of which you are, have responsibilities so how can you look to the LLFA to lead you when you are the very group they have deferred to?
- The prior WODC Cabinet member for the Environment, when approached deferred to someone else who deferred to someone else again. Silence is not going to solve our problems. Given the seriousness of the issues perhaps we need a focused Cabinet Member for flooding? This needs to change and is totally unacceptable. Ducking the issue will not solve our problems – this is not an issue of elections, parties, or political manoeuvring. We can only solve this as a joined-up team.
- How about we start with where is the Section 19 Report on the Christmas floods? We have heard nothing, 6 months on. What are the recommendations and when can they be shared with us?
- Given your duty as an RMA, and the LLFA via OCC appearing to itself defer to WODC on related matters, it is still legally responsible for duties stipulated under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010.

We want to help you all practically, and now have river engineering knowledge, we are not going to go away given simple inspection and regular maintenance regimes would help resolve things. We know it is not an overnight solution, but everything so far tells us there is nowhere near enough attention being given to this critical issue.

Extract from an EA Policy paper - Thames Valley Flood Scheme

“UK climate change projections data estimates the winter daily average rainfall in England could increase by approximately 41% by the year 2050. Peak river flows could increase by approximately 50%. This would increase the severity and intensity of flooding for communities, business and infrastructure.”

I am wearing my wellies in readiness, if you have not noticed.

Thank you for your attention.

END OF ADDRESS