

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

**Re: Questions for the Environment Scrutiny Committee**  
**Tony Stark, Woodford Mill, Mill Street, Witney OX286DE**

**Questions for the Environment Scrutiny Committee**

Good afternoon. I am Tony Stark; I live at Woodford Mill and like William am a founder of the Witney Flood Mitigation Group. We were flooded and out of our house for 12 months after the 2007 floods, have had flood water in are garden on various occasions since and on Christmas Eve 2020 had flood water in our garage and within half an inch of entering the house.

We have invested in two types of flood barriers at great expense, to me. We do not know if they are effective.

I need you all to realise the stress and anxiety it causes at every period of heavy rainfall when we are in fear of it flooding again. No one should be expected to live in fear of being flooded when there are things that can be done to prevent it happening.

We, residents and business owners in Witney who are firmly at risk of flooding have many questions for you, for which we require answers:

1. There are hundreds of vulnerable people living within the immediate flood envelope
  - a. Riverside Gardens/Riverside house on Mill Street
  - b. Mill House on the Roundabout
  - c. Otter's Court in Aquarius
  - d. Others in private housesWhat provision is being made for them given the debacle we experienced at Christmas Eve?
2. What, if any of our above inflation increase in council taxes are being directed towards flood prevention measures?
3. Many thousands of pounds that have been wasted on umpteen surveys of how to possibly hold floodwater back upstream from Witney, not only from the river, but also the Hailey Road drain. Sadly, nothing has ever materialized from these, because of costs involved. surely the formula for what is now economic or not has changed massively. Why is money being wasted on reports that produce no action or change the outcome?
4. What recommendations from these 2007 reports have been carried out? For example, has the river under the Bridge Street bridge been regularly de-silted as recommended? It would be good to see evidence of when this has been done.
5. Have you calculated the cost of flooding (given the history we have seen) now on average every 7 years and averaging £50,000 per household/business to put things right? Let alone the loss in value of effected properties. How do you put a price on people's mental wellbeing? – additionally any cost/benefit analysis needs to include the impact on the town and businesses in lost business and productivity when our

main and only bridge across the Windrush is inundated with water and Witney is not accessible?

6. What responsibilities have been delegated to you from OCC? What has the LFA delegated to you as WODC. What are you doing next? What funding has been passed to you by the OCC or the LFA in relation to environmental responsibilities they are delegating?
7. Have you received the Section 19 report from the Christmas floods yet and how are you acting upon it? If it hasn't been received who is preparing it? When can we see a copy?
8. Has a survey been done of all the peak levels reached throughout our town and all flood debris recorded to aid future planning?
9. Given that WODC and WTC are the riparian landowners for much of the centre of Witney, can we see your plans to remove trees, and silt from the area? Can WTC and WODC confirm all adjacent land and associated water courses that are the responsibility of the landowner have been cleared and are in good condition?
10. Why is it that we always discuss reactive flood action – telling us to go and buy barriers when all other 16 of the 17 typical flood avoidance measures (see exhibit B from the EA) all rely on public authority action and investment, yet you are focusing on the one and only item that puts the financial and practical responsibility back on us?
11. Are you aware that we did not have enough properties in the Witney flood at Christmas to qualify for the £5k DEFRA grant for flood barriers? – what have you done to fight for us?
12. Have you thought about surveying the river downstream from the bridge to find solutions as to how, more flood water could be stored if various obstacles were removed, which in turn could lead to a more substantial flow under Witney Bridge?
13. Are you aware that there is a serious and specific problem in Witney? EA river level data from 23-25 December that we have analysed ourselves specifically points to additional 'effects' in Witney – the shape of the valley, Hailey Road Drain, the Bridge, the state of maintenance of the river course, and the ability of rainwater to soak away given all the new housing developments you allowed to be built since 2007?
14. Are you aware that there are fully funded River Attenuation Schemes in places like Stroud, for which oversight of these is fully funded by the EA? Why haven't we got anything similar for Witney?
15. Are you all going to complete the EA Thames Valley Flood Scheme Public Consultation questionnaire given the importance of our Town and Community? Is WODC going to give a response and get involved in the scheme?
16. Can you help us identify, through your planning team all associated Riparian Landowners in the area so they can be held to account for land and river

management? They need to be contacted and held to account with their responsibilities in line with the law. Our recent meeting with All Souls Representatives highlighted that they did not even know Witney flooded in December, yet they have trees blocking the river on their land and have responsibilities for clearing them.

Mr Wareing, on our behalf for Woodford Mill, asked you several questions back in February (Exhibit A), We are still waiting for answers – they are included once again in my submission below so I will not read them today.

Will you formally assign someone to work with us, jointly and with the other agencies so we can effectively use our time wisely and get some tangible and deliverable outcomes for our community and give them hope for the future?

We look forward to your collective response and expect detailed responses soon. When will we receive a response to all our questions, given we are now in the 6<sup>th</sup> month after the last flood event?

Just to end we really want to see some action from you and in particular we want flood prevention measures in place for Witney, not individual property protection. You have responsibilities for Witney and surrounding areas. We believe things can be done to prevent Witney being flooded in the future and expect you to take responsibility, with our help if needed, to Make It Happen.

Thank You for your attention.

END OF ADDRESS

## **EXHIBIT A - Questions posed at February WODC Environment Scrutiny Meeting:**

"So how did we get here again' given the intended flood avoidance actions, and what is happening and when going forward?"

### **1 – What are the lessons from the recent flooding and what are the corrective actions being taken going forward?**

More concrete emergency plans need to be made. Where would people have sheltered given the coronavirus situation? Are there enough hotels nearby? How many socially distanced families can you accommodate in a school hall, or even in the Kassam Stadium?

### **2 – Specifically, the council flood emergency line and support for us was a shambles, as was support for people on the night.** We had little support from WODC on the ground but what about management escalation during an emergency, which has now been proven not to work. All emergency services that involve public health and safety have parameters, service levels and reviews for quality and consistency. That needs to be sorted ASAP.

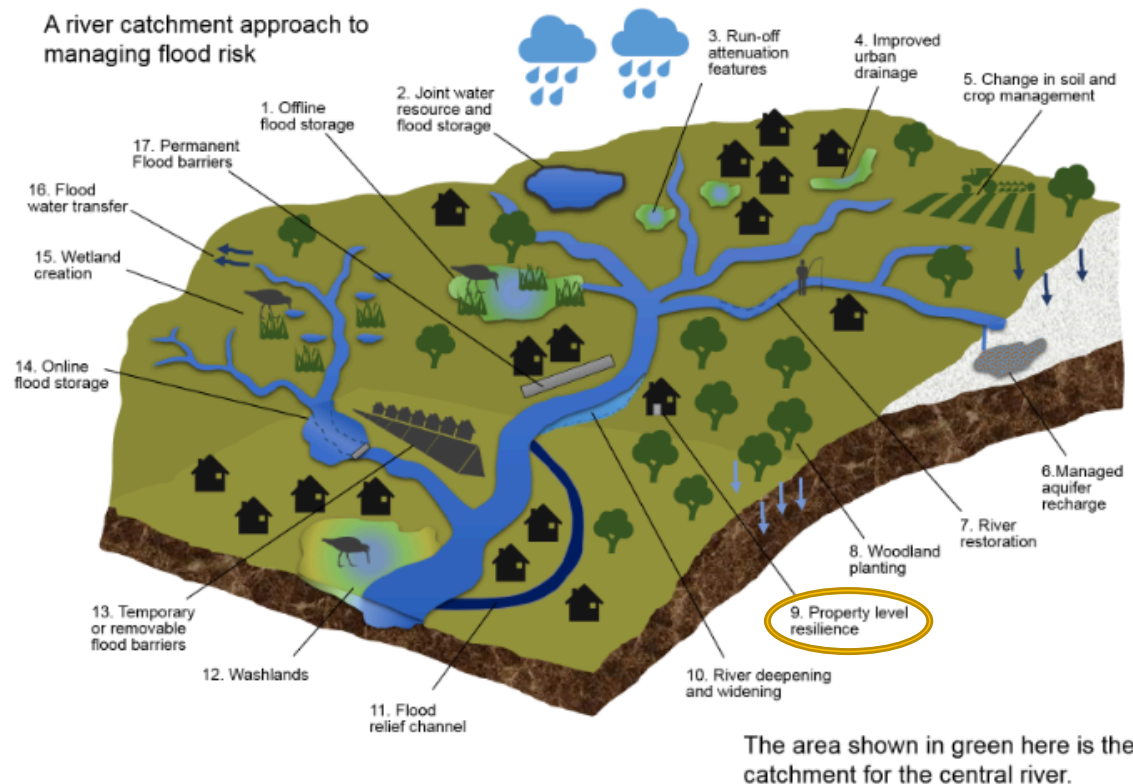
**3 - Evidence of Maintenance Records since the 2008 Flood Report** - I do recall some de silting work a couple of times especially when we came close to flooding in 2013/14, however the flood report post 2008 stated that there should be maintenance every couple of years - I do not believe this has happened and coupled with all the fallen trees along the river of late, this additional EA responsibility is surely exacerbating the situation. **Have all the recommendations been followed? Who has assessed our progress against them? Do we need another study given the last one is now 12 years old?** There is no doubt a lot more technology that can be used to model future floods for example or determine what every action taken might give us in terms of a percentage improvement.

**4 - Bridge Alteration Feasibility Study –** I understand it was deemed unfeasible to alter the bridge to allow more water through during floods, can this be revisited, and can we get other opinions/options to consider? There must be solutions, and to date WODC has not been able to influence OCC who own the bridge. There is a turn in the river just before the bridge that causes it to silt up and of listed buildings, do we think those listed buildings would still be listed given the effects this is having on a community? I am sure those who listed them in the first place would change their minds given the situation we are in.

**5 - Government Helping Residents Affected -** Are those affected and those likely to be affected due rebates on their taxes given that last 10 years+ of apparent inaction, and going forward? Many of us were either physically or emotionally (or both) affected by the Christmas Eve floods - for me it was the second time, and I can tell you it was very unpleasant, even though we were luckier than many. There is of course many other actions that residents and communities can take themselves, which I won't cover here.

**7 - Planned Actions Going Forward -** What is the plan for future flood prevention? How often do WODC, OCC and EA meet to discuss flooding risk and plans in action – can we see what is happening? Allowing more building in the Windrush Valley, means someone has to have accountability for the downstream effects of these decisions, and public services shrugging their shoulders and saying public funding cuts are causing this is not the answer given all the taxation income and prosperity that new homes bring to an area."

## EXHIBIT B – Source: EA Thames Valley Flood Scheme graphic



Above you can see that of 17 different approaches to managing flood risk, only ONE relates to residents protecting their own properties at their own cost.  
How far have you assessed, or requested the assessment of the other 16 options?