

BA13+ REPORT TO WESTBURY AREA BOARD

The latest BA13+ Community Area Partnership meeting had an environmental theme. We met on 17th November, a suitably rainy night, to hear about flooding and fracking in Wiltshire.

The meeting was held at the Leighton Recreation Centre, and was chaired by Carole King.

A good-sized audience heard first from Guy Parker from the Environment Agency who led a talk entitled chalk and cheese; briefly touching on the Somerset levels (where the cheese comes from) and concentrating on the chalk areas, i.e. here in Wiltshire. Areas of chalk are susceptible to groundwater flooding. The chalk formations run down and across from Buckinghamshire and down to Dorset across Wiltshire, and down into France. The chalk can be 300 metres deep, and full of water. An explanation was given of what causes groundwater flooding, and how it is different to runoff water.

The Environment Agency provide an excellent warning service. They monitor groundwater levels via boreholes.

Guy concluded by speaking about the Somerset Levels (the cheese to the chalk). A good argument could be made for not digging ditches and dredging them, and instead planting more trees as water levels wouldn't rise so high.

Trevor Carbin then spoke briefly on fracking, or hydraulic fracturing. In West Wiltshire in 2015 South Western Energy were awarded licences for exploration in a 20 sq km area around Westbury, primarily looking for coal-bed methane. There is however very little coal in this area so it was a bit of a mystery as to why they were awarded licences. There was then a consultation on the impact on the wildlife in the area in late 2015. In September 2016 it was announced that South Western Energy were not taking up their licences, quoting rising energy prices. Trevor is of the opinion that there is a 99% percent probability that there won't now be any fracking in this area. Even so it would be impossible to say whether it would be an environmental disaster here in Wiltshire or whether it would be like Whytch Farm in Dorset, the largest operation in Europe, which for the past 40 years has quietly got on with its business without anyone really noticing. At one time they were producing 100,000 barrels of oil a day. Trevor was thanked for a very thought provoking presentation.

The next Partnership meeting, which takes place on Thursday 16th February 2016 at 6.45pm at the Leighton Recreation Centre, Wellhead Lane, Westbury is themed around Westbury's jobs and economy. We will be welcoming guest speakers from the new Hawkeridge Business Park and from the Head of Economic Development and Planning at Wiltshire Council.

Phil McMullen, BA13+ Community Area Partnership administrator