

Wiltshire Council

Full Council

21 May 2024

Item 7 - Public Participation

From Colin Gale – Chairman of Rushall Parish Council

To Cllr Nick Holder - Cabinet Member for Highways, Street Scene and Flooding Questions

Introduction:

This question was originally submitted on 10th April for the Cabinet on the 16th April, however, the submission was 1 hour 37 minutes late past the cut off time for public submissions. It is believed that the question was forwarded by Democratic Services to the Director for Highways but no acknowledgement/response has been received from WC Highways.

Background:

There is a long ongoing issue of flooding at Rushall Bridge outside the entrance way to Avon Villa and River House. There are two drains outside the entrance way to the properties and a further drain/gulley on the opposite side of the road. These drains/gullies feed into the River Avon on either side of the bridge, There is clearly no routine scheduled drain clearance maintenance service by Wiltshire Council to these drains apart from Rushall PC requesting the Parish Steward to clear the top entrance to the drains/gullies. The Parish Stewards have repeatedly requested the Gulley Tanker come and blast the drains to clear them and so that the Stewards can also identify the entry point to the river.

I have repeatedly reported the flooding issue on MyWilts without any success over a long period of time, see below:

Case reference 00046518 – reported 8 Nov 2021, 5.33pm – Flooding on Pewsey Rd.

Wiltshire Council Note: 9th Nov 2021, 9.32am – This report has been completed.

Wiltshire Council Comment: Thank you for your report. As a priority, we empty blocked gullies that are causing house flooding or road safety issues. If the gully is not causing an immediate issue but could cause future house or road safety flooding, a visit will be arranged as soon as resources permit. As this gully is not causing flooding to a high speed road with high traffic levels or causing damage to property it is not considered a high priority at this time. The process to empty gullies such as this one is to report it to your local Parish or Town Council who can request the gully to be cleaned by Wiltshire Council's discretionary gully emptying service. Please be aware that often a drain looks

blocked from the top but the water is still draining underneath. Often there is little we can do to prevent water pooling in periods of high rainfall and we are aware of hot spots. I can understand that this is frustrating but we work on a priority based system so we cannot deal with this drain any sooner than when its routine unblocking is due, unless requested by the town or parish council. The report will be closed.

Status: Completed

Case reference 00046626 – reported 9 Nov 2021, 2.30pm – Flooding on Pewsey Rd.

Wiltshire Council Note: This report has been passed to our Highways team for investigation.

Status: In Progress.

Case reference 00132482 – reported 13 Nov 2023, 10.41am – Flooding on Pewsey Rd.

Wiltshire Council Note: This report has been passed to our Highways team for investigation.

Status: Received.

In January 2024 there was extensive flooding at Rushall Bridge with the water level across the complete width of the road approximately 12 inches deep. The front garden of Avon Villa was completely underwater and the water was lapping at the door step to the property. The garage which is located at the front of the house was underwater and between 6-12 inches deep. The car which was in the garage had to be removed and moved to the driveway of River House, the neighbouring property. Rushall PC sand bagged the entrance to the house to try and protect it and also had to sandbag the driveway to try and limit the impact of the bow waves caused by vehicles driving through the water, see pictures below.



On the 4th March 2024 I reported the blocked drains to the local Highways Engineer and Highways Manager requesting the drains be cleared as a priority and provided picture of the drains.

There was some delay in getting a response from the Wiltshire Council Highways Engineer so I again emailed WC on the 19th March pointing out the availability of the newly promoted drain blaster in the WC News.

Finally after enlisting support from the local WC Councillor I received a response from the Highways Engineer on 2nd April. However, the response was not particularly promising advising that "At present the council's resources are being targeted at areas where properties are experiencing flooding".

On 'Good Friday', 29th March Pewsey Road at Rushall Bridge was again flooded and again the water went up to the door step of Avon Villa and again the garage to the property was underwater and the car had to be moved out of the garage.

I emailed the local WC Highways Engineer and Highways Manager again on 3rd April advising that the current low priority being placed by WC on getting the drains cleared was unacceptable and again I provided pictures clearly showing the extent of the flooding.

I received a response back from the WC Highways Manager the same day which was full of apologies but lacked any real commitment to resolve the issues as a priority. The local Highways Manager identified a further contributing factor to the road flooding being the drain outlet on the Avon Villa side of the road being to a head in Avon Villa garden. The outlet head is approximately 3-4 metres from the river and the ditch was silted up. The Highways Manager suggested that it was the property owner's responsibility to keep this ditch between the head and the river clear. How the council were ever allowed to run the highway drainage through private property is beyond belief and then for the drain head to fall well short of the river is clearly a significant issue in the overall highway drainage. The owner of Avon Villa is a senior lady who lives on her own. I have started to dig the ditch on behalf of Rushall PC but believe in the long term this is a WC Highways engineering issue to resolve.

Note! The drainage head/outlet from the gully on the other side of the road into the river is at the river edge.

I emailed the local WC Highways Manager on 5th April and advised that I have started to clear the ditch and requested that the drain tanker is arranged as a priority but have had no response.

Question (P24-12)

What does it take to get routine scheduled highways management of clearance of blocked drains cleared carried out? It is clear from the background information above that there is a serious shortfall which is causing unnecessary risk and damage to private properties?

Response

We recognise that regular maintenance of drainage assets is crucial for flood prevention. Consequently, additional funding has been allocated to this aspect of highway maintenance and efforts are underway to establish a robust and improved gully cleaning program.

Examining the specific case used to illustrate this question, investigation reveals that a major cause of flooding at this location is the minimal elevation difference between the carriageway, property threshold levels, and the nearby river. Throughout much of the winter, during which we have seen unprecedented and prolonged wet weather, the river level has remained very high, submerging the outfalls from the drainage system and impeding the water flow through it.

Question (P24-13)

What is WC Highways going to do to resolve the current highways drainage into the river which is clearly inadequate and falls well short of a long term drainage solution?

Response

Some works have already been undertaken to clear the short length of channel into the river. However, the proximity of the river to this location does mean that a solution to prevent flooding completely is not possible. Mitigation measures, such as property level flood protection, are possible for property owners to pursue.