

Chairman's Announcements

Prior to Wiltshire becoming a unitary authority the responsibility for Land and Highway Drainage was divided between the County Council and four District Councils. This sometimes caused difficulties in resolving flooding and drainage issues due to the different powers of enforcement held by the county and district councils.

To fulfil its legal obligations as a unitary authority Wiltshire council has set up a flooding and drainage team comprising of former county and district highway and land drainage staff and consolidated the budget for this team. Information held by the different councils concerned with flooding and drainage has been consolidated and work is being carried out to identify, prioritise and undertake the funding of flooding and drainage schemes more efficiently. By combining some of the various schemes it has also enabled the council to apply for government funding which would not previously have been possible.

As part of this process Wiltshire Council has also set up two Operational Flood Working Groups (OFWG) one, in the north and the other in the south of the county. These groups mirror the river catchment areas operated by the Environment Agency and offer an opportunity for all those stakeholders with an interest in Highway Surface Water, Surface Water Run-Off, Drainage and Flooding to consider the issues relating to flooding and drainage within each respective area. Stakeholders included Wessex, Thames & Southern Water, Environment Agency, Network Rail and the Highways Agency.

These issues cover such items as:-

- Identifying lead authorities for each issue to enable a better more focussed efficient and coordinated response, enabling resources and funding to be targeted effectively.
- To make recommendations for bids to fund major projects.
- To consider proposals for prioritising funding and programming of schemes.
- To implement Government legislation on drainage and flood management.
- To comply with the legal requirement to map our surface water and establish collaborative information with our partners.
- To respond to Community Area Boards in respect of flooding and drainage issues.
- To communicate with members of the public regarding the work we are doing via the Wiltshire Magazine and Parish Newsletter.

Over the coming months we will be engaging with parish and town councils to help with updating our mapping systems with their local knowledge, help to identify any local issues that may be exacerbating the problem which are not apparent on initial inspection. This will be done in conjunction with the Area Boards. Towns and Parish councils will be sent a map of their areas so that any known flooding can be identified

and stored on our system. This will enable Wiltshire Council to consolidate its information on flooding and drainage issues ensuring that every location of flooding is established including property residential and agricultural land.

We have already successfully carried this out by asking our highway engineers to mark all known flood sites so they can be imported into our main GIS mapping system. Once this has been done we will be sharing this knowledge with the Environment agency helping us to understand and evaluate the flooding within the whole county. There has also been good work carried out by the Flood Warden Scheme which has operated well over the last five years in the South of the County which is operated by the Environment Agency. It is hoped to be rolled over the remainder of the county over the coming months. The Flood Wardens are usually members of the Parish Councils allowing them to be more informed.

We are also hoping to organise two “Flood Fairs”, planned in early 2010 in conjunction with the Environment Agency inviting Area Boards, Town and Parish councils and other interested stakeholders to participate and raise awareness of flooding and drainage issues and how local communities can help and to showcase what is available for property protection.

A representative from Parish and Town councils may also be invited to attend their respective OFWG meetings to state their case for funding to alleviate their problems and discuss their concerns. Work is also being undertaken on updating the information held on the Council’s website which will include details of work schedules, not only those of the council but also stakeholders where available.