

Fact Finding Meeting Notes

Present:

Cllr Cook, Cllr S Christie and Cllr Holtby of Sturton by Stow Parish Council

Cllr Turner of Stow Parish Council

Cllr Paul Wimhurst – LCC Councillor and support system for Highways and Transport

Matt Harrison- Manager for LCC Flood and Water Department

Ryan Davies Senior Flood Risk Officer of LCC Flood and Water Department

Michelle Toyne - LCC Highways Manager

Nathan Whitfield- LCC Highways Engineer

Representatives of Sturton by Stow and Stow Parish Councils met with the Lincolnshire County Council Highways Department, Flood and Water Department and County Councillor on Wednesday 3rd December at 10am.

Cllr Cook opened the meeting at 10am

Cllr Cook welcomed everyone to the meeting and began by outlining the current position, referring to the documents shared prior to the meeting. These included a flooding log of evidence collated since the extreme weather experienced in January 2025 and the questions residents raised with Anglian Water at the recent public meeting.

He explained that flooding events and extreme weather are becoming more frequent and have had detrimental effects on roads and property. Some residents have only just moved back into their homes, facing the uncertainty of when it might happen again.

The aim of the meeting was to discuss how the existing infrastructure coped with the recent rainfall. Primary discussions have been with Anglian Water, as they are responsible for both surface water and sewerage drainage.

In the public meeting Matt Moore (AW) had explained that many of the challenges in resolving issues and implementing large-scale mitigation come down to financial constraints. However, he was positive that smaller mitigation measures to alleviate flooding could be achieved, provided incidents are correctly reported so that resources and funding can be allocated appropriately. He agreed and encouraged a public multi-agency meeting after initial conversations with yourselves.

The overflow of surface and sewage water is the result of volumes exceeding the capacity of the existing infrastructure.

During investigations into standing water on Saxilby Road, which had been reported through Fix My Street, it was identified that Diamond Cable, when laying their ducting some 20–30 years ago, had damaged all the pipework leading from the gullies. LCC has since been replacing the affected pipework, this raises concern that similar issues or contributing factors may be present in other areas of the village.

The increased presence of Anglian Water within the village since the public meeting has been noted, and it is hoped that this indicates ongoing surveying and inspection of the pipework. It has also been observed that some ditches have been cleared. If this work was carried out as a result of actions by your departments, then thank you; if not, then our thanks go to the resident or landowner who undertook it.

During flooding, it has been observed the natural flow of water within the village tends to gravitate towards the main roads, this could be as a result of natural land drainage, historical issues to the drainage and infrastructure, capacity of the treatment works and infrastructure are inadequate.

At 10.10am Nathan Whitfield- Representative of LCC Highways joined the meeting.

Matt Harrison highlighted that there were a multitude of factors at play by a multitude of services. Surface and sewerage water being AW. He stated that he would be happy to support a multi-agency meeting and his department already has good working relationships with AW and other agencies. He reiterated that LCC have direct involvement with other agencies and can look at potential works for places that have been flooded.

He asked whether properties have been flooded as a result of surface water or the back up of sewage water?

The Chairman replied that it was both.

Matt Harrison expressed the importance of riparian responsibilities of watercourses to the adjacent landowner; Highways are responsible for the gulleys and drains. It is a case of which service can intervene. He stated that Storm Babet and Henk and January 2025 have had a big impact across Lincolnshire of which the department which is still being assessed on a scale to see what funding is available and to prioritise where it needs to be allocated.

Michelle Toyne stated that in relation to flooding Highways role and responsibilities is to maintain the assets that drain the highway to ensure safety for road users.

Highways carry out a cyclic program to clear assets monthly/annually and bi-annually. For assets that require extra maintenance there is an off-program jetting for high priority areas.

Environmental conditions, including changing weather patterns such as long, dry summers and mild, wet winters, have a significant impact, often overwhelming the drainage assets and infrastructure.

Cllr Cook shared that AW had planned to increase the outlet of the River Till which was agreed by multiple agencies. This never happened and has now been superseded by nature. The mean level of the River Till is higher than the outlet.

Nathan Whitfield highlighted his responsibilities alongside Michelle are to drain the highway. He highlighted that the systems are not designed to deal with the flow in extreme weather conditions. He stated that a submerged outfall is less efficient but will still discharge.

At 10.20 am Cllr Cook stated that there are concerns for our neighbouring village Stow regarding the floods as we are the route of access for commuters from Stow and neighbouring villages and during a flood the middle of our village is impassable.

Stuart or Martin reiterated that the Highways remit is to drain the Highway. Yet AW can discharge the surface water into the highway drains and vice versa with sewage.

We understand that watercourses are riparian responsibilities. The outfall from Fleets Road runs across the bottom of Ashfield to a ditch known locally as the parish drain. This has not been maintained for years and most likely contributes to the flooding issues. In our opinion this is a riparian responsibility. Who has the power to get the persons responsible to clear the drain?

Matt Harrison informed the Parish Council that in Lincolnshire the Internal Drainage Board can carry out enforcement if the concern is in their area. The IDB also covers extended areas and can action enforcement on behalf of the LCC.

The process would be to raise a concern about a watercourse, LCC would inspect the watercourse and make an assessment as to the contributing factors to the flooding.

A letter stating, 'Your property has been identified to have riparian responsibility in common law of the drainage of the watercourse....'

Cllr Cook suggested that circular letters stating this area is your responsibility could be beneficial and applying riparian rights to common law if we could have a list of landowners to work from.

Ryan Davies noted that Highways has written to landowners. He outlined the process of engaging with the correct landowner and the watercourse in question then if no response on to escalation 'get in touch with us', to giving legal notice with a reasonable time frame of response and action. He asserted that work without prejudice is cheaper than law.

Cllr Holtby stated that Fleets Road can become a mini river and that 95% of the ditch is accessible from the farmer's field.

He described that flooding impacts Fleets Road and High Street dramatically. Closing the road is a drawn-out process which needs to be much quicker to be the most effective. Waves caused by vehicles push the water nearer to properties and cars become stranded on the road. Is there a way we can gear up the response and be authorised to close the road more efficiently at a time of crisis.

Michelle Toyne responded that closing the road is co-ordinated response with LCC, the media and the police. The police can close the road and report to LCC. As for the Parish Council they would not be authorised to close the road.

Cllr Cook asked if there was an option to use signage such as 'Flood Ahead' that could be used during a flood as emergency measures to warn, deter and hopefully prevent motorists accessing the roads prior to the roads being closed officially.

He emphasised the time wasted and damage caused having to wait for an official to close the road can have detrimental that could be lessened if the community could close the road or deter motorists. This request will be raised by the Highways representatives to see if it is a viable option.

Matt Harrison responded saying that often the use of Community Emergency Plans is efficient at implementing measures at a community level. The Flood and Water Department and collectively help the Lincolnshire Resilience Forum mitigate a Community Emergency Plan.

At 10.40am Cllr Holtby left the meeting.

The Clerk added that Sturton by Stow has an active CEP for the village. In regard to flooding it offers locations of sand bins with replenished supplies of sand and sandbags to enable residents to prepare in the event of extreme weather forecasted. The plan highlights areas prone to flood Stow Rd, High St, Fleets Road, Thorpe Lane, Bransby, Lower End of Ashfield Parish Drain and particularly vulnerable residents within Queensway and the process of opening the village hall as a safe space in the event of their homes flooding and even the flooding of nearby villages.

Local action such as informing the flood line and utilising the police to close the road is as much as we were aware that we could do, to be able to reduce traffic on a community level using Flood Ahead' signs would be very effective.

Cllr Cook added that this year we have purchased two additional sand bins. We now have four sand bins that are positioned through the middle of the village and are accessible to all who are prone to flooding. He shared that District Cllr Mullally assisted Queensway with the fitting of floodgates earlier this year to help protect their homes and keep the flood water out.

Michelle Toyne noted that in 2023 an extensive surveyed showed that the highways design was working properly. She highlighted that the increase impermeable areas such as blocked paved driveways can have an impact on highways drainage.

It was identified that new houses on Church Lane, Stow is a good example of this???

It was stressed that the Flood Resilience for homes is very important and reiterated that residents need to think about the impact that increasing the impermeable areas around their homes can have.

Cllr S Christie reiterated that hard surfacing front gardens and blocked paved driveways have increased and will not help land drainage.

Cllr Cook stated that a grant available for up to £5,000 was advertised at the public meeting to help with flood prevention.

It was questioned if the number of gulleys could be increased to deal with the surface water.

Michelle Toyne shared that she had seen that the parish council has links on its website already in relation to the grant.

Nathan added that we could install many new gulleys, but it would not solve the issue.

Cllr Cook added that the rain has nowhere to go

Ryan Davies added that increasing the gulleys would increase more points of ingress into a system which is already full. Increased drains could help in some situations but not all as increased drains gives more areas for the water to back up and overflow from.

Michelle Toyne stressed the importance of reporting to Fix my Street, it collects data and highlights areas of concern and priority for new assets. Data and evidence is required for a drainage scheme. She stated that the Highways Department were content that their assets are working as they should and encouraged the use of Fix my Street for data collection.

Data and evidence from reports are scored by our assets team. This is a county wide perspective used to allocate funding where needed and to ensure repairs and maintenance can be scheduled to keep the asset working.

Matt Harrison highlighted that prejudice maintenance can lead to a default position. The funding is not there to provide default maintenance and management.

The Fleets Road/High Street watercourse is in an ongoing process with general maintenance going forward. He informed the council that the LCC has no privileged access at a higher level. It was acknowledged by the Flood and Water Department that none of the agencies hold a comprehensive list of landowners; landownership is identified on a “need to know” basis when issues arise. The LCC must pay a fee to search the Land Registry in the same way any individual would and does not have the budget to carry out searches for all parcels of land.

Matt Harrison highlighted the importance of educating homeowners events tenants of housing or land about riparian rights and who the responsibility lies with. Ultimately the landowner is responsible for the adjacent water course however on a leased piece of land or rented housing this responsibility could be contracted to the tenant. He reiterated that the general rule is If the deeds do not state that you are not responsible then by default you are under common law.

He informed the Councils that IDB Witham Third can carry out enforcement in the extended areas acting as an agent for the LCC Flood and Water Department and suggested that they would be a useful agency to make contact along with the LRF explore further options available for CEP disaster resilience route perspective for an emergency and initiating additional action within the community in the event of an emergency.

He spoke on behalf of LCC Flood and Water Departments and Highways that talking in a closed environment has been incredibly beneficial for those immediate questions and that they would be more than happy to attend a public meeting to present the facts of what the departments can do and can't do and also point out what the residents and landowners can do and the restraints involved.

He identified that although the LCC Highways and LCC Flood and Water Departments are different departments they work together and have good working relationships with the IDB, AW and the EA.

In a public meeting they could discuss the importance of riparian rights, the emergency plan within the community. Discuss property resilience flood measures and encourage residents to prepare preventative measures to protect their homes when extreme weather is expected.
Storms have highlighted the issues in riparian rights. This is a collective focus in the Flood and Water Team.

Michelle added that the systems Highways have in place are working in a way in which they are supposed to and that funding is data lead.

Nathan Whitfield stated a quote that even building new infrastructures today, whatever we build there will always be a storm to beat it. The issue cannot be buried, it must be managed and the most important aspect is for properties to be kept dry as this can be detrimental.
Together we need to educate residents. You cannot increase infrastructure without taking into consideration the limits, criteria, effects and guidance.

Cllr S Christie suggested a landowners attenuation pond to hold the water to then slowly run off could be a localised system.

Matt Harrison added that the issue was that at the time of the floods the ground was so saturated that the water could not soak in.

Cllr Cook suggested that identifying the pinch points to drive the allocation of resources as in the past this has led to pipe sleeving and has been effective.

Cllr S Christie questioned the process of Fix My Street and what happens after the initial report. Michelle Toyne stated that the reports go via herself and then onto a program brief and risk-based process to Nathan Whitfield. The criteria are the level of risk and interaction level on Fix My Street for example, multiple reports related to the same issue that determines the priority of reports. The dialogue is kept open with the initial reporter who is kept updated with the process.
Nathan added that photo evidence is really helpful.

The clerk mentioned that in the past she has reported gulleys of concern and a message linked to the report is that Highways acknowledge that the gully is blocked but because it is not causing serious issues to the highway safety or property flooding, we will not be ordering work at this time. The clerk shared that the parish council were concerned about the response as the reported gulleys are in high-risk flooding areas.

Michelle stated that the wording of the feedback acknowledges there is a problem and that is currently proposing as low risk and has been prioritised accordingly. The department are aware that the wording can be seen as and are working on alternative text.

Cllr Cook requested if it was possible that Michelle could draft a small article for the newsletter to explain the process and importance of Fix My Street and how it feeds into data collection and allocation of resources to be featured in the next issue of the village newsletter.

The clerk stated that the deadline for the next issue is the 31st December, if this was achievable.
Michelle agreed to create an article prior to the deadline.

Cllr Cook thanked the agencies for attending and agreed that an open dialog and points of contact are very useful.

The meeting closed at 11.45am

Meeting notes recorded by S. Hoyland, Clerk to Sturton by Stow Parish Council.