

**Flood Risk Action Group (FRAG)**  
**8 June 2021 @ 4pm - Virtual Meeting via Teams**

**Meeting Minutes**

**Present**

Councillor Karen Shore – Chair  
Councillor Hugo Deynam  
Councillor Paul Roberts  
Councillor Sam Naylor  
Councillor Gillian Edwards  
Councillor Andrew Cooper  
Mr William Briggs (BB)– Briggs and Partners & Northwich Flood Protection Group (NFPG)  
Kieran Collins (KC) – Highways Commissioner  
Jim Gibbins (JG) – Place Area Commissioner  
Phill Green (PG) – Media and Communication Manager  
David Brown (DB) Environment Agency  
Stephen Ballard (SB) Canal and Rivers Trust  
Dan Cross (DC) River Weaver user  
Andrew Coward (AC) – Major Flood Event Management Engineer

Members of the group introduced themselves.

**Apologies**

No apologies were given

**1. Minutes of previous meeting**

The minutes of meeting 2 held on the 25 May were proposed by Cllr Roberts, seconded by Cllr Deynam and were accepted.

**2. Approval of Actions Matrix**

KC ran through the actions giving a general update and confirmed that Cllr Bryan will be briefed in advance of his meeting in relation to FRAG 1. FRAG 9: options were being assessed for the sumps due to underground services. FRAG 10: Chris Samuel had been invited to a future meeting. Cllr Roberts: was FRAG 10 looking purely at Northwich or issues across the borough. KC; borough wide including the evacuation of key areas, plans would dovetail into other RMA's. Cllr shore confirmed that she had attended meetings with Chris Samuel where resilience plans were being developed. KC: there were certainly lessons to be learned from the 2021 storm.

KC outlined the purpose and function of the sump to Cllr Naylor. Cllr Naylor said that there was an alternative escape route on foot from the rear of Weaver Court.

BB: Jake from IWJS and Andy Coward had been to site and had lifted several covers in the area so now had a good understanding of where things drained to. Jake had advised that they were not permitted to work on UU assets unless appointed by UU. This left a hole in the available data. The 750mm UU drain on London Road had a lot going into it. BB had, before the meeting, issued a short paper containing 6 critical issues with timelines and KC confirmed that this would be replied to separately. The 2021 flood had greater extents than the 2019 flood so the CCTV survey was not complete. 55 of the surveys had been abandoned. It was vital that UU were at one of the FRAG meetings. Cllr shore could write

to UU if required. KC: UU were happy to share their data so he saw no issues in UU engaging. Was it possible to have one drawing with all the information on it? Possibly not. BB said that the NFBG could deal with DWG files so could be put together. AJC had been to site and had confirmed the outfall from Theatre Court into the river. The pipes contained silt. Still issues around ownerships of the various flap valves. BB found it was better if you knew who was delivering what by when. By the next flood it would be too late.

### **3. Environment Agency and Canal and Rivers Trust – Questions/discussion on dredging of the River Weaver.**

Cllr Shore introduced David Brown of the EA and Stephen Ballard of C&RT to discuss the dredging of the Weaver. Concerns had been raised by the public: if the river was dredged more often would this help with flooding?

SB said that the river was dredged to maintain it for navigation purposes and not for flooding and that the C&RT were not an RMA. The river was surveyed for depth and around £150k was spent each year on dredging. Every 3 years the spend increased to around £400k and this was for silt removal from the Dane. These figures can fluctuate depending on the survey information.

In 2012 the EA looked at several options and dredging was considered. In looking at the river they took a step back and considered the nested pounds that control the water levels to maintain the river as a navigable waterway. It is the sluices that are used to control the levels. Under the Water Resources Act 1991 the EA have powers. During the scheme development the CRT offered information on how the sluices operated and these scenarios were modelled. The conclusion of these models was that a greater depth upstream has little impact if the water level is already high. Dredging would not lessen the impact on Northwich town centre. It is the controlling structures that are more important and opening more sluices to move the water. In a 1 in 5 year event it takes approximately 40 minutes for the storage capacity to fill so for larger scale events there is little difference. If additional storage was to be provided this would mean a massive area of land would be required and this was too costly to buy.

Cllr Shore opened for questions for DB and SB.

Cllr Cooper: felt that in 2019 and 2021 the CSO at Whalley Road became river locked so there was nowhere for the water to go. Was the flooding due to the lack of flap valves or sluices not being operated? DB didn't want to comment on the performance of the UU equipment and felt it was for them to respond to at a later meeting but the river levels were at a 1:20 event with significantly more rainfall on the catchment area. DB: the river levels were modelled for 2005 and 2012 but these two events did not have the flood defences in place so no differentiation between the river level and water behind them. If lessons were learned it was that the additional pumping became overwhelmed by the size of the event. The flood defence scheme had been designed with full consultation with UU. Cllr Cooper so if all the valves were river locked without the defence wall, you can't tell. DB confirmed.

Cllr Roberts: in relation to creating sumps upstream on areas of land, too expensive. Could we use compulsory purchase powers (CPO) to purchase say 5 – 10 acres? This cost would be less than the cost of the recovery of the town centre. DB: the area required would be in the region of 500 – 1000 hectares, a significant area. Water is already falling on this land so would be difficult to trap and hold the water. People have the right to use their land. Compared to the HS2 project where the bulk of the project costs are land purchase. The maths had to work for any project.

Cllr Edwards: how were area or the frequency of dredging identified? SB: the CRT used Hydro survey data to locate specific areas to dredge.

Cllr Naylor: Valued DB's input. Was the consequence of the flooding downstream made worse by the flood defences? In 2019 and '21 Reedbank and Riverside View had suffered flooding, is it because of the defences? DB: as part of their projects they cannot make the situation worse as a result of their schemes. The scheme design makes sure it doesn't make flooding downstream more severe. DB didn't know the specific area in question but would be happy to run through the models with and without the defences if required. KC: there was different causations between the 2019 and 2021 events.

#### **4. Open Questions, Dan Cross to present his report on the historic dredging of the River Weaver and item 5; member discussion.**

DC firstly apologised for the length of the report and outlined that the Weaver discharged into the Mersey at Eastham where there were flood gates to protect the canal. In 2019 the tides were on their way up and had the event been 6 days later then the tide would have topped the gates at over 10m. Outlined the large catchment from Peckforton Hills to the Winsford Flashes. Lots of owners and stakeholders. Large costs to maintain fully, this was the elephant in the room. He had included a lot of historical facts in the report, the Dane was fast flowing and carried a lot of silt, when this meets the slower Weaver the silt is deposited. The CRT were dredging for navigation not flood reduction. Feeling that once its out of Northwich it is someone else's problem. If the sluices were silted up they were not much good and should be dredged to the historic profiles. Sluices lose their effectiveness that's why they were built in their locations at their size. If your gutters on your house were full of moss they wouldn't work correctly.

Cllr Shore pointed out that the CRT are not a RMA and the Council could lobby for legislation to be changed. DB had read DC's report and if the Weaver is to function it needs to be maintained. DB pointed out that the structures were designed to handle the water and the Dutton Lock can be passed over. DC points out that there was a 0.7m level difference between the Mersey and the incoming Weaver. DC it was important that there was a difference. SB said that sluices were set to normal levels but may fluctuate. If the level is high in the navigation then other sluices will be open. The CRT were not funded to monitor flooding. KC to write to DS to confirm the number of sluices that were operating in the 2019 and 2021 events. DC said that Winford Flash had not been dredged since 1989. DB said that the CRT had provided the relevant information to allow the EA to model the flows. Questions on who 'owns' Winsford Flash. SB said that they did work closely with the EA and it wasn't a 'them and us'. DB reiterated that it was not dredging but the structures that controlled water levels.

Cllr Shore thanked DC for the report and that it would be passed onto Atkins for consideration in the S19 process. The points regarding dredging were acknowledged and we were not saying to dredge the Weaver from start to finish.

Cllr Edwards would support any changes to legislation. MP's across the borough were working hard on the issue.

Cllr Naylor: it was difficult for laypersons to take in but the historic photograph of Barnton compared with the modern one showed the level of siltation. DB reiterated that it was what was controlling the level downstream that was the important issue.

BB commented on the interesting history contained in DC report. Could more be done? Is there a 'magic bullet'? If funds were available would more have been done? DB: A bigger over pumping capacity at Dock Road and a couple of other pinch points would mitigate.

Cllr Shore: There was a lot of work going on in the background including seeking funding for potential schemes. The FRAG should make recommendations for several funding

streams. Schemes already in place should be referenced in the interim report. KC: Section 19 reports are a key element in most funding applications.

## **6. Approval of forward works programme.**

Discussion on when to open future meetings to borough wide or concentrate on Northwich with United Utilities invited to the next meeting. Cllr Cooper would have questions for UU. Cllr Naylor: UU were big player in Northwich in the 2019 and 2021 events and he would welcome their explanation. Chris Samuel was also invited to a future meeting to discuss the emergency response. Cllr Shore: as the interim report was soon due have Chris Samuel and UU at the next meeting and then open up to the wider borough. Cllr Roberts was keen to close off the Northwich issues and Acton Bridge but important to demonstrate progress across the borough. Cllr Shore: there could be further meetings up to and beyond the production of the cabinet report. There was MP correspondence in relation to other S19 locations, Parkgate Road for example. Cllr Deynam was happy with the approach but reiterated the need to consider the borough wide issues. Cllr Shore: agreed that the next meeting would be with UU and Chris Samuel invited.

## **7. Any Other Business**

BB had included a discussion paper which included plans with dates and timings into summer. They didn't want to be flooded again. We have got lots of pieces to the jigsaw.

Cllr shore thanked David and Stephen. DB reiterated that he would be happy to clarify anything discussed.

## **8. Date and time of next meetings**

22 June at 16:00

6 July at 16:00