

Minutes of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 9 October 2007.

Present:

Members: Councillor Ken Browne (Chair)
“ John Appleton
“ Gordon Collett
“ Jose Compton
“ Eithne Goode
“ Katherine King
“ Ray Sweet (Vice-Chair)
“ Sid Tooth
“ John Whitehouse

Also Present: Please see attached list of attendees.

Speakers: **Ruth Meek**, Principal Officer, Climate Change, Environment Agency, **Peter Clarke**, Flood Risk Mapping and Data Management Team Leader, Environment Agency, and **Rod. Wilkinson**, Principal Hydrologist and Water Resources Planner, Severn Trent Water Ltd.

1. General

(1) Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor George Atkinson (WCC), Councillor Geoff. Ashford (N&BBC) and Beccy Dunn (Halcrow).

(2) Members Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

None

2. Climate Change and Impact on Water.

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and referred to purpose of the meeting which was to –

“explore with our partners the likely impact of climate change on water in Warwickshire. As well as developing our understanding of climate change in the area, the meeting will discuss the plans that the Environment Agency and Severn Trent Water have in place to ensure that flooding and its effects are minimised and that domestic and industrial water supplies are ensured in the future and about looking to the future rather than a post-mortem on the past.

He introduced and gave brief biographies of the three speakers and outlined the proposed programme for the meeting. (Copies of the speakers' presentation slides are attached).

Ruth Meek (EA) highlighted and commented on –

- The Greenhouse Effect – the rapid rise in carbon dioxide in the atmosphere due to human activities, strong global warming observed since the 1970s
- Recent climate change and its causes - information from the Met Office Hadley Centre (observed and model simulated).
- Future climate change, globally and in the UK - important to manage properly the carbon dioxide in the soil released through global warming.
- Uncertainties in predictions – due to future emission scenarios, natural variability and imperfect climate models.
- Climate change and Environment Agency (EA) - included in the statutory guidance the EA must help to reduce emission, limit the impacts and continue to protect the environment (impact of flooding, land management and soil protection – working with farmers) To manage the rate of change and ensure that the landscape and species are protected.

In reply to questions Ruth Meek said that with regard to–

- (1) The Gulf Stream - the latest Hadley predications was that it was not likely to stop in the next century but that if it slowed down any cooling effect would be more than offset by the increase of temperatures due to climate change.
- (2) Diseases - The World Health Authority had stated that malaria in the UK due to climate change would have a zero effect because as a relatively wealthy nation we have the medication and resources available to deal with the disease. There would, however, probably be an increase in the number of cases of salmonella and food poisoning.
- (3) Decline of oil and gas supplies - were predicted in the future and, therefore, energy efficiency needed to be managed better and there would be a rise in bills. However, this would not lead to a self-limiting answer to climate change. There was thought to be large reserves of fossil fuels under the Arctic which might become accessible as the Arctic becomes ice-free in the future so leading to further carbon emissions and climate change.
- (4) Good management on farms - was important in terms of knowing which fertiliser and nutrients to use and what crops to plant. Good water management on farms was necessary to reduce the need for irrigation (how to plant crops to incorporate new techniques of collecting rain rather than it running off the land). Also not working land that was too wet and heavy as this compressed the soil. The growing season in the UK had extended one month because of climate change and this needed to be managed.
- (5) Erosion of the coast line – it was expected that some coastlines would be eroded and there was need to make room for water by letting in the sea

Resources were being used on protection, future options might need to include relocating some communities further inland.

- (6) Domestic Water Supply – The EA supports the need for a twin track approach to water management, that is reducing demand (water efficiency, rain water harvesting and tighter regulations for new-build etc.) and where necessary increasing supply (new reservoirs).

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Peter Clarke (EA) spoke about flood risk management and climate change and highlighted –

- (1) Climate Change issues – more frequent storms, more severe weather and the summer floods 2007. The cause of this summers floods related to the volume of rain that fell within a short space of time.
- (2) Predicting impacts – flood modelling hazard mapping and climate change map. The last 3 years the EA had established a dedicated team to look at improving flood zones and driven by new developments. (PPS 25 directive, which should prevent inappropriate developments).
- (3) What can the EA do? – raise awareness, build defences, improve flood warnings, prevent inappropriate development and re-instate natural floodplains.
- (4) What can you do? – Flood protection products identified, emergency planning worked well, protection of key infrastructure sites (energy supply stations and strategic roads), Sustainable drainage systems (Suds).
- (5) Impact of flooding - displaced residents and enormous public health issues (sewage, rats, infestation and water borne diseases).
- (6) Impact on the environment – disposal of flood damaged goods.

In reply to questions Peter Clarke said with regard to -

- (1) Protection of mobile homes on flood plains – He acknowledged that these homes were vulnerable and that there was need to raise residents' awareness of the risk and to look at improving policy and to change the law to protect them. One particular site in Warwickshire was lower than the river next to it.
- (2) River Blythe (Coleshill) maintenance and clearance work – Designation as an SSSI did not prevent maintenance work being carried out.
- (3) EA Review of run off from agricultural land – (Andy Cowan question) – EA has reviewed coefficient of run off recently.

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Rod. Wilkinson (Severn Trent Water Ltd.) highlighted –

- (1) a range of statistics – 7m customers, supplied 9 English counties and Powys, average daily supply = 1988MI/d, sources split equally between reservoirs, rivers and groundwater and unaccounted for water approximately 500 MI/d. (Only Thames Water supplies more water than Severn Trent).

- (2) The relevant legislation within which Severn Trent operated.
- (3) Severn Trents' planning process and its regional Strategic Grid (extending from Derby to Gloucester).
- (4) The issues facing Severn Trent – rising demand, loss of resources – water quality (e.g nitrates), climate change (more variability in run off, more seasonality, higher peak demands) and a level of service that guaranteed no more than 3 hose pipe bans per century.
- (5) Possible options for the future: Supply side – new sources (increased licensing) and raw water storage. Demand side – water efficiency plus greater leakage reduction.

In reply to questions Rod. Wilkinson said –

- (1) The creation of a national grid system was not widely supported. This was partly because only part of the UK that experiences water shortages was the southeast and people were concerned at the prospect of sizeable pipelines being laid across the county just to meet the needs of one area. Severn Trent Water currently exported water to Yorkshire through its local grid but this might have to stop if surpluses currently available in this area were reduced.
- (2) Re-use of "Grey" water was being developed working with a large number of developers in the east midlands. There was a need to overcome public perception about the use of grey water (overcoming prejudice about using it for watering the garden).
- (3) Severn Trent Business Plan – was produced every 5 years and looked ahead over the next 25 years. There was very little capital development after 2000 because there was no funding and a negative "K" to raise charges to customer. In 2004 Ofwat allowed expansion and development was allowed and would be considering schemes from all zones that it would want to fund.
- (4) Drinking Water supply to customers following flooding in Gloucestershire – the water supply was cut off for some areas for 3 weeks following the summer flooding and bottled water was supplied. [Note: The correct response to this question was provided after the meeting - Severn Trent provided bottled water to its customers sourced from commercial providers from all over the UK. Collection and disposal of the empty plastic bottles was dealt with by local councils.]
- (5) Tap water v. bottled water - Severn Trent drinking water received the standard treatment to take out the taste and fluoride was added. (Not all areas had fluoride added to the water supply e.g. Leicestershire.)
- (6) Impact of Climate Change on the water supply and investment – Severn Trent had invested extensively in the maintenance system and UPVC pipes were resilient and flexible than metal for pipes. The effect of climate change, if the weather became milder, was that there was likely to be less soil movement and less leakage.
- (7) Water pressure in rural areas . - It was acknowledged that on some occasions water pressure would drop to unacceptable levels. This was the case when water was being drawn off the mains by the fire and rescue service to tackle fires or fill appliances. Rod pointed out, however, that the regulations set by Ofwat allowed for this.
- (8) Foul water in rural areas - Some development in rural areas put extra strain on foul water systems and in some cases it had been found necessary to pump to larger treatment plants such as Longbridge.
- (9) Mineral Extraction site - Severn Trent utilised former mineral sites for water storage areas

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The Chair then opened up the meeting for further questions to all three speakers.

Jo Ingle asked a question in connection with new legislation relating to run off of rainwater from Waste and Recycling Facilities and Peter Clarke undertook to take this issue up with the Environment Agency and report back to her direct.

During discussion Members said that –

- (a) They would welcome more information from Severn Trent and the Environment Agency to enable them to make more informed decisions on planning developments.
- (b) Expressed concern about the development of town gardens and the loss of valuable drainage and the increase in hard surfacing.
- (c) It might be beneficial if farmers left, rather than cleared out ditches. This would slow down flow and reduce the risk of flooding.

Andy McDarmaid invited comments from each speaker about what the County Council could do to assist them in their work –

Rod. Wilkinson stressed the importance of local authorities –

- Keeping Severn Trent informed at an early stage of any developments or changes that they might have an input.
- Being more helpful to Severn Trent in facilitating road closures when dealing with leakages.

Peter Clarke said that local authorities should use more of the information held by the Environment Agency on flood warnings to assist help facilitate emergency action e.g. road closures.

Ruth Meek asked that local authorities disseminate information held by them to inform EA of case studies and best practice.

During further discussion the following comments were noted –

- (1) That the district councils consulted Severn Trent on developments but it was felt that they did not get feedback before the site had gone through the planning process. Severn Trent should be encouraged to become more involved at an early stage.
- (2) The post flooding public drop-in sessions were considered to be beneficial and residents welcomed the opportunity to talk about their problems with the organisations most involved and this had given encouragement for more partnership working.
- (3) That the public drop-in sessions had finished but the officers had been overwhelmed by the public interest.

- (4) That a joint authority website, which the public could access, would be very beneficial as would joint working by the three speakers' organisations and the district and county councils.
- (5) The EA did not have sufficient resources to carry out many site-specific flood risk assessments.
- (6) The EA had many on-going feasibility studies but cost benefits analysis of were unlikely to succeed when competing nationally for funding.

The Chair thanked the three speakers for attending the meeting and providing Members and Officers with a very interesting and informative morning. A report would be produced for a subsequent Committee to develop issues raised during the meeting.

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Chair of Committee

The Committee rose at 12:45 p.m.