

Briefing note for parish and town councils

OPERATIONAL FLOOD WORKING GROUP

Engagement with watercourse and ditches to reduce flood risk

I am writing to emphasise the importance of engaging with one of the Operational Flood Working Groups (OFWG) in Wiltshire.

Flooding happens in all seasons and is increasingly affecting more communities that have not been flooded before. The OFWG is a proactive group of parishes that come together, every other month, to highlight areas that have either flooded or are at risk of flooding. The Flood Working Groups are attended by all the Statutory Authorities, including Environment Agency, National Highways, Network Rail, Wessex and Thames Water and Wiltshire Council.

It is THE forum to raise issues with the people that can do something. I often hear from Parishes that wish they had joined the OFWG before a flood event because the reason for the flood may have been mitigated, or even alleviated, by raising it with the group. Your engagement with the OFWG is part of a Partnership initiative aimed at engaging with communities to reduce the effects of heavy rainfall.

Watercourses and Ditches

It is often the case that, in the first instance, Wiltshire Council approaches landowners to request them to clear overgrown and blocked ditches and watercourses where there is a risk of flooding. However, there is an extensive network in the county and it has been found that parish and town councils have in many cases been successfully able to provide valuable assistance in identifying and helping to resolve these issues, including working with us and landowners to help reduce the risk of flooding in their communities.

As part of the partnership working initiative I would like to ask your council to become more involved in the early stages of this process by using your local knowledge and contacts to make the initial informal approaches to landowners by asking them to undertake clearance of their ditch or watercourse.

The first approach could for example be in person or by telephone or email followed by a letter. For your assistance we have attached a template for the first and second letter to this briefing note. We would also ask that you retain copies of any emails or letters sent to the landowners. Town and parish councils have both local knowledge and contacts and the ability to take a less formal approach and the parish council's role would be perceived to be a neighbourly reminder highlighting the parish's role within the community. Wiltshire Council will be looking to informally review this initiative within 6 months.

The suggested approach is set out below:

1. An informal approach by (in person, by telephone or email) from a parish or town council representative is made asking a landowner to clear ditches and watercourses.
2. If there is no action by the landowner, the first letter can be sent requesting action.
3. If the clearance is still not undertaken a second letter can be sent to the landowners.
4. Should you encounter any problems please do not hesitate to contact the council's drainage team who can then prioritise any further action as appropriate. If necessary, they may also instruct the council's legal team should any formal legal action be necessary or arrange for a referral to the Environment Agency where a watercourse is a main river.

Attached, to this briefing note, is the map of Wiltshire showing the Boundaries for each of the OFWG (North & South). The initial point of contact is Renate Malton, (contact details below).

If you would like to discuss this matter further or require any additional information please do not hesitate to contact Renate Malton, Flood Resilience Officer on 01225 712514 or renate.malton@wiltshire.gov.uk or drainage@wiltshire.gov.uk

Wiltshire Council as land drainage authority continues to work with many local communities to appoint flood wardens and help communities or individuals plan for such events to reduce the risk to people and property. If you would like assistance or advice in making a flood plan please contact the drainage team or Renate Malton as above.

Yours sincerely

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