

CABINET REGENERATION SUB COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, 26 SEPTEMBER 2017

PRESENT: Councillors Simon Dudley (Chairman), Jack Rankin (Vice-Chairman), Phillip Bicknell, Carwyn Cox, Samantha Rayner, MJ Saunders, Derek Wilson and David Evans

Principal Members also in attendance: Councillors Christine Bateson, David Hilton and Philip Love

Also in attendance: Councillor Malcolm Beer

Officers: Mary Kilner, Andy Jeffs, Russell O'Keefe, Karen Shepherd, Alison Alexander and David Scott

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None received

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received

MINUTES

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the Part I minutes of the meeting held on 5 September 2017 be approved, subject to the following amendment:

- **p. 9 to read 'The size of the pool had been increased to 10 lanes,**

RIVER THAMES SCHEME - FUNDING

Members considered recommending to Council a future funding commitment to assist in delivery of the River Thames Scheme.

The Sub Committee was addressed by Ewan Larcombe. Mr Larcombe explained that for 60 out of 67 years he had lived in Datchet or Wraysbury. He was a member of both Datchet and Wraysbury Parish Councils but he was not speaking on their behalf. He was the leader of the National Flood Prevention Party. He had been first elected to Datchet Parish Council (DPC) in 1986 when the Maidenhead, Windsor and Eton Flood Alleviation scheme (MWEFAS) project was being developed. At that time RBWM repeatedly refused to talk to DPC on the basis that the channel did not cross the parish boundary. Only after the channel was realigned into Datchet (in order to avoid Eton College land) did RBM start talking to DPC. Mr Larcombe had given evidence at the MWEFAS Planning Inquiry in 1992 and intended to give evidence at the forthcoming RTS Planning Inquiry.

In 1992 the Inspector stated *'It would be very embarrassing to all concerned if the intended discharge capacity of the FRC was not achieved'* but it was to be another ten years before that truth became apparent. Not only was the Jubilee River unable to carry its design capacity but the channel was also sub-standard in design, construction and operation. Structural repair costs after first use in January 2003 at only two thirds

capacity totalled about £10m. Manor Farm Weir was designed and built with the curve reversed, the Slough Weir repair cost £680,000 while the Myrke embankment rebuild in Datchet cost £1.3m to repair. The designers shut up shop and eventually contributed £2.75m in an out-of-court settlement. The promise of enhanced protection for two hundred homes in Datchet (as submitted in evidence by the 'experts' at the 1992 Inquiry) was proven to be incorrect and new houses in Ellesmere Close were a monument to professional incompetence. He believed the Environment Agency had neither admitted to nor learnt from their previous blunders and it was now at risk of repeating the mistakes of the past.

Since the Jubilee River was constructed and Maidenhead and thereabouts has been 'protected,' ever more development had been permitted on flood plain in the area. However displaced flood water had to go somewhere and it went downstream via the man-made and shorter Jubilee River channel. Attenuating features had been bypassed and the accelerated flood water swamped undefended villages, arriving earlier, rising more quickly and peaking at a higher level. Consequently downstream communities previously unaffected by flooding since 1947 had been submerged in 2003 and twice in 2014; and these were not bad events in comparison to 1947 flood levels.

The recommendations from Clive Onions' 2004 'Mechanisms of Flooding Report' had not been implemented and had still not seen a report on the 2014 flood events. This was now a duty on the lead local flood authority under the Floods & Water Management Act 2010 Ch. 29 Part 1 (3) s19.

River Thames dredging ceased about 1996, the dredgers were sold and the disposal facilities closed. There was no consultation. In Mr Larcombe's opinion there was an opportunity to increase the conveyance capacity of the Thames that had been knowingly ignored for twenty years simply because it undermined the justification for the proposed three new parallel channels and associated works. He believed that channel algae, invasive species, sedimentation and maintenance were major issues both now and in the future. Furthermore there were many River Thames bridge flood arches that had been blocked and used for business purposes, thus reducing conveyance capacity still further and generating afflux that increased flood damage.

Mr Larcombe was concerned about insufficient publicity, insufficient scrutiny, unintended consequences and lack of accountability. He would not support the RTS until the Jubilee River and the Thames were rectified. He was also concerned that the majority of RBWM Councillors due to consider a £12m commitment at a meeting later the same evening were blissfully unaware of these facts.

The Chairman explained that the River Thames Scheme (RTS) was a major flooding infrastructure project that had been developed by the Environment Agency (EA) for a number of years. It would provide flood protection for 15,000 homes, 2300 of which were in the borough, and also for the local transport infrastructure.

Councillor Rankin joined the meeting at 5.40pm

The Chairman explained that the current anticipated cost of the scheme was £476m. Funding of £248m had been secured so far, therefore leaving a funding gap of £228m. He would be attending a meeting with HM Treasury to review progress on the funding gap in November 2017, at which point it was likely a decision would be taken whether to proceed or not. The scheme covered a number of local authorities, all of which were in Surrey aside of the Royal Borough. As Leader, he felt the council should do all in its power to bring about the completion of the scheme, to cover the section from the Jubilee River to Teddington, given the severe impact of flooding on residents. The EA

had been clear that the 2014 floods would have been significantly worse if there had been a relatively modest increase in rainfall, including closure of the M25 and disruption to Heathrow. The RTS was an essential piece of national infrastructure.

Councillor Beer joined the meeting at 5.43pm

The council was in a position of financial flexibility as a result of its regeneration activities to consider capital expenditure of £10m over four years, alongside a flood levy of up to £500,000 per annum.

Councillor Saunders commented that this was a complex process; Mr Larcombe had identified a number of issues. It was the council's responsibility to demonstrate it was unambiguously prepared to put money where residents needed. The Chairman commented that the likelihood of another severe flood event was certain, This was not a "nice to have" but a vital piece of national infrastructure. Councillor Bicknell commented that it was a huge risk if the scheme was not funded: 15,000 homes and 100,000 square feet of commercial space would be affected.

Councillor Love asked how the figure of £10m had been determined. The Chairman explained that the EA had originally asked for £50m, which was beyond the means of any local authority; £10m was therefore a substantial and meaningful figure. Councillor Hilton compared the amount of homes affected to the number in Ascot (18,000), to highlight the importance of the scheme. The Chairman highlighted the importance of the borough being seen as unequivocally supportive; this would help other councils to go through their own due processes and contribute.

Councillor Beer commented that the parish and borough Flood Forums had been considering the scheme for the last ten years. It had always been recognised that the local authorities would need to dig deep and contribute. However there was some resistance as the borough was dealing with other people's water, yet had to pay for the management. There was a strong argument that the scheme should be nationally funded. The Council currently contributed to the River and Coastal Flood Relief Committee. To increase the amount to £500,000 was very steep. The leaflet included in the agenda outlined the commercial benefits of the scheme, he therefore questioned whether Heathrow was contributing. A number of properties in the areas affected in 2014 were still not habitable. The Chairman confirmed that conversations were ongoing with major infrastructure providers such as Heathrow about contributions.

Councillor D. Wilson stated that he supported the recommendations. He asked whether the Treasury would know all potential contributions from local authorities by the next meeting. The Chairman explained that each local authority was considering its own position. If approved the proposals represented a big step forward.

Councillor S. Rayner explained that the funding of £285,000 per annum was for four years up to the proposed implementation. The maintenance costs would then be £500,000 per annum. The 2014 floods had caused devastation to people's lives and many had still not recovered, therefore the scheme was vital.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That Cabinet Regeneration Sub Committee recommends to Council:

- i) £10m, spilt over four years, is added to the capital programme commencing 2020/21 (subject to delivery of the full scheme).**
- ii) There is an agreement in principle of paying a flood levy of up to £500,000 per annum to the Environment Agency as a contribution to the operating and maintenance costs (subject to new legislation being enacted to make provision for this)**
- iii) If recommendation (ii) is approved a delegation to the Head of Finance in conjunction with the Lead Member for Finance to develop and introduce a flood levy be approved**

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting whilst discussion takes place on item 6 on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1-7 of part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

The meeting, which began at 5.30 pm, finished at 6.05 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....