

Finance and General Purposes Committee

Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> March 2018

Report of the Assistant Town Clerk / Head of Services

Agenda Item 9. Property Matters: Flood Alleviation in Abingdon

Following on from the presentation given to Members by the Environment Agency on Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> March 2018 concerning flood alleviation works for Abingdon, officers will need to bring forward to the Finance and General Purposes Committee any final proposals produced.

Attached to this report is a newsletter from the Environment Agency detailing the planning works being undertaken and an exhibition in the Abingdon Community Space in the precinct.

S. F. Rich

23 March 2018

# Reducing flood risk in Abingdon

Newsletter

March 2018

**We have secured partnership funding from the Vale of White Horse District Council and the Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (RFCC) to progress work to reduce flood risk in Abingdon.**

**We are looking into a number of options all of which include a potential flood storage area at Abingdon Common with possible complementary measures such as natural flood management and property level resilience to further reduce flood risk.**

## Background

The Rivers Ock, Thames, Stort and the Sandford Brook all contribute to flooding in Abingdon. In July 2007 over 400 residential properties and 20 commercial properties flooded internally. In 2017 we built a flood wall to reduce flood risk to St Helen's Mill. We have temporary defences available to deploy in Potenger Way, Tower Close, Meadowside and Hermitage Road. We have also carried out modelling and surveying and ground investigation work.

## Modelling results

Using improved techniques and the latest flood data we have updated our flood modelling for the River Thames and the River Ock. The Environment Agency will use the results to update their planning flood map later this year.

## Flood storage area

We have used the modelling results to help us review the options to reduce flood risk in Abingdon. We have found that all the feasible options include a flood storage area at

Abingdon common. However, there is still a significant amount of investigation required, and a scheme has not yet been designed or approved.

The area which could be used to store flood water at Abingdon Common is floodplain and farmland. We have been meeting with local landowners to share the modelling results and the proposed options. To complement a flood storage area we are also looking into the benefits of natural flood management in the wider catchment and property level resilience.

## Natural flood management

Natural flood management is when natural processes are used to reduce the risk of flooding, for example restoring bends in rivers, slowing the flow, tree planting and changing the way land is managed so soil can absorb more water.

We have looked into the benefits that natural flood management could offer. Our results show that in combination with a flood storage area natural flood management would be



effective in reducing flood risk. Natural flood management would also bring environmental benefits and could help reduce flood risk to smaller communities upstream.

### Property level resilience

Property level resilience is a way to reduce flood risk to individual properties. This is done by installing products such as flood doors, door barriers, automatically closing airbricks, non-return valves and sump pumps to reduce the amount of water getting inside the property.

### Forward look

- **28 March 2018** - public drop-in, see details below
- **March 2018 to March 2019** – Development of the flood storage area design and modelling. Continue to investigate complementary options.
- **Spring 2019** – Planning application submission
- **End 2019** – Full Business Case approval
- **2020** – Estimated construction start date subject to approvals

To find out more about our plans to reduce flood risk in Abingdon and talk to the project team, come to our public drop-in

**Abingdon Community Space**

**18 Bury Street, OX14 3QT**

**28 March 2018**

**Drop in any time from 2.30pm to 7pm**

We are keen to hear your views and learn from your local knowledge to help shape our plans

**Displays will be up in the community window  
from the 26 March to the 1 April**

To contact the project team, or to request to be added to the mailing list email [enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk)

**ABINGDON-ON-THAMES TOWN COUNCIL**  
**FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE**

**27<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2018**

**REPORT OF THE TOWN CLERK**

**Agenda item 10: Property matters**

**(i) Abbey Hall**

The Council has received a formal offer, subject to contract, from the Regal Cinema (Evesham) to rent the Abbey Hall for a two-year period whilst it is surplus to the Town Council's requirements. This will be considered in confidential session alongside the other option in relation to short-term use, the use of the Hall by the Town Council as a hiring space. It is intended to issue a public update on this matter before the Easter break.

*To note.*

**(ii) Information Centre (temporary relocation)**

In April 2018 works are due to commence on the reception area to the Guildhall in which the Information Centre has been located since September 2015. This work will also include access to the Old Magistrates Court and the Roysse Court gardens.

During this period the original intention was that the Information Centre would continue to operate from the Guildhall, relocating from its current location to the Roysse Room when the reception works were taking place. We were aware that there would be some disruption and challenges but following further discussions with the surveyor and the builders it is now clear that there was need to relocate the Visitor Information Centre (VIC) to another building on a temporary basis because the works will be too disruptive in terms of noise, dust and access.

In terms of options, the Old Magistrates Court has been considered as a possible space to relocate the Information Centre but it has no level access at present, will itself be affected by the building works and would mean lone working. In relation to the Roysse Court offices, there is not enough space and again there is a lack of level access. There are no other town centre properties to relocate the Information Centre and therefore your officers

propose that the Information Centre be relocated to the Kempster Room in the County Hall immediately after the museum's Easter family activities, due to take place in April 2018. In considering this matter the following points should be considered:

- + The area is large enough, has IT and phone connectivity;
- + It may be accessed via the platform lift;
- + There is a synergy between the Museum Service and the Information Centre;
- + Temporary relocation would bring more visitors to the Museum and in particular the café;
- The Museum is closed on a Monday and the Information Centre does not open on a Sunday;
- Opening hours would need to be considered as the two services have different operating times. This has staffing implications;
- Careful consideration is required regarding how to accommodate education/ family activities which take place in the Kempster Room and a temporary exhibition.

The County Hall Museum Management Committee considered the proposal at its meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2018. It is minuted that the Committee:

*considered the impact this could have on activities currently planned for the Kempster Room but also recognised the council-wide need to find a new temporary home for the VIC. Cllr Patrick Lonergan stated that, notwithstanding any practical issues, he could appreciate that there is a level of synergy between the VIC and the Museum. Other members agreed that such a move could encourage more visitors to the Museum Café.*

*Cllr Samantha Bowring asked for assurance that if the committee agreed to the relocation of the VIC to the Kempster Room, the committee would be able to revisit this decision, if the impact was a negative one for the Museum. The Town Clerk replied that he hoped this would be possible but could not guarantee it as there were implications for the whole council and other committees may have different views.*

*The Chairman, Cllr Monica Lovatt, agreed that the VIC has to be relocated to somewhere whilst the building work is on-going.*

Following the meeting there has been consultation and positive discussions with staff at both the Information Centre and the Museum.

**It is recommended:**

- (a) That the Information Centre be relocated to the Kempster Room until 31<sup>st</sup> July 2018 and that authority be delegated to the Town Clerk to make all necessary arrangements for this to take place. That this delegation includes authority for the Town Clerk to incur expenditure within existing revenue budgets and to make necessary staffing arrangements.
- (b) That matters be reviewed by the relevant committees during the next cycle of meetings.

*This will be a resolved matter.*

**(iii) Old Magistrates Court – Space to Change**

At its meeting of 19<sup>th</sup> March 2018 the Guildhall Committee recommended that a Space to Change toilet be built in part of the Old Magistrates Court. I would refer members back to my report to that meeting and the plans presented.

The proposed toilet would be accessed via the door which led to the cells and I attach a plan from the Council's Surveyor. Having looked at the space available and the alterations which would be required it is understood that it is feasible to locate the toilet in this location. It can also be built so that the facility can be self-contained and therefore made available to the public 24 hours a day through the RADAR Keys Scheme. Note that the door opening will need to be widened further to comply with the guidance.

With the building work ongoing at the Guildhall I have requested that the surveyor ask "Inside Out Developments" to provide a quote for this work which, subject to evaluation by the quantity surveyor, this will then be brought forward to the Finance & General Purposes Committee for approval together with proposals in relation to capital and revenue funding. In relation to capital funding the recommendation will be that this work be financed from the Council's pooled property fund.

*This will be a recommendation to the Town Council.*

**(iv) St Nicolas Closed Churchyard**

St Nicolas' Church was closed to new burials by the local diocese at the same time as St Helen's Church, in the 1850s. Following their legal

closure most churchyards are then maintained by and at the expense of the local parish council. However this is not an automatic process, it requires a formal resolution and hitherto whilst the closed churchyard at St Helen's has been acknowledged as the Town Council's responsibility, the position in relation to St Nicolas' has remained ambiguous.

St Nicolas' church are now keen to clarify matters and so both the Council's Archivist, Jackie Smith, and our colleagues at the Berkshire Records Office have undertaken research.

The minutes show the following:

*18<sup>th</sup> September 1929: An application by Abingdon Borough Council to the Ministry of Health for an order conferring the powers, duties and liabilities of a parish council with respect to maintaining closed churchyards.*

*5<sup>th</sup> February 1930: "A copy was submitted of an Order made by the Minister of Health conferring on the Council with reference to the churchyards of the Churches of St Helens and St Nicolas all the powers duties and liabilities of a Parish Council with respect to maintaining and repairing closed churchyards."*

I am of the view that the evidence is that responsibility to maintain the closed churchyard of St Nicolas transferred to the Borough Council in 1930. Note that the land remained in the ownership of the church.

Maintenance of the closed churchyards was not detailed in the transfer arrangements following local government reorganisation in 1974 and transfer of Borough responsibilities to the District and Town Councils. This is because in the Local Government Act 1972 Closed Churchyards became the responsibility of the parish council.

Having regard to what is said above the decision to formally acknowledge that the Council is responsible for the churchyard should be one without reference to financial implications. However it should be noted that there will be financial implications but we estimate this would be modest in terms of routine grounds maintenance and could be funded from existing budgets. It is our understanding that the church authorities are willing to continue to maintain the churchyard but that they would potentially be looking to a grant to do this. I will report further on this at the Town Council meeting.

Note that legislation requires closed churchyards to be maintained in "decent order" and this has been subject to some debate between councils and the church authorities over the years. There could potentially be significant future expense in relation to matters such as boundary walls.

It is **recommended** that the Town Council takes responsibility for the closed churchyard of St Nicolas with immediate effect.

*This will be a recommendation to the Town Council.*

Nigel Warner  
Town Clerk  
23<sup>rd</sup> March 2018.